

U P A N I Ṣ A D S E R I E S

KATHOPANISAD

A DIALOGUE WITH DEATH



Commentary by
Swami Chinmayananda



Swami Chinmayananda

Hailed as the second Swami Vivekananda, Pūjya Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda (1916-1993) has left a great legacy behind for mankind. On realising the true purpose of life, he worked tirelessly and with tremendous energy for more than four decades to spread the message of Vedānta. A great orator, writer, leader, patriot and spiritual giant, he is one of the finest representatives of Indian spiritual heritage. The sprawling worldwide organisation of Chinmaya Mission carries on the torch lit by this great Saint.



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Central Chinmaya Mission Trust

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Published by:
Chinmaya Prakashan
The Publications Division of
Central Chinmaya Mission Trust
Sandeepany Sadhanalaya
Saki Vihar Road, Powai, Mumbai 400072, India
Tel.: +91-22-2803 4900
Email: ccmtpublications@chinmayamission.com
Website: www.chinmayamission.com

•

Distribution Centre in USA:
Chinmaya Mission West
Publications Division
560 Bridgetown Pike
Langhorne, PA 19053, USA
Tel.: 1-888-CMW-READ, (215) 396-0390 Fax: (215) 396-9710
Email: publications@chinmayamission.org
Website: www.chinmayapublications.org

•

Designed by:
Chinmaya Kalpanam, Mumbai

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Digitized by:
Chinmaya Digital Media, Mumbai

Contents

S. No.	Subject Matter	Page No.
1.	Message Divine	i
2.	Preface to the Revised Edition	ix
3.	Introduction	xi
4.	Peace Invocation	xvii
5.	Chapter 1	
	i. Section-1 – (valli-1).....	1
	Mantras 1-29	
	ii. Section-2 – (valli-2)	65
	Mantras 1-25	
	iii. Section-3 – (valli-3).....	147
	Mantras 1-17	
6.	Chapter 2	
	i. Section-4 – (valli-4).....	191
	Mantras 1-15	
	ii. Section-5 – (valli-5).....	231
	Mantras 1-15	
	iii. Section-6 – (valli-6).....	264
	Mantras 1-18	
7.	Alphabetical Index to Mantras.....	307





Publisher's Note

Chinmaya Prakashan has great pleasure in presenting the revised edition of '*Kaṭhopaniṣad*' to all spiritual seekers.

Sincere efforts have been made to eliminate errors and to add diacriticals marks. In addition, on the advice of learned Ācāryas an introduction has been incorporated to highlight to all seekers how Pūjya Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda's original *Kaṭhopaniṣad* came to be.

Chinmaya Sampadan and Chinmaya Kalpanam deserve compliments in bringing this revised edition and we hope seekers continue to be inspired by this immortal Knowledge.

Chinmaya Prakashan
Publication Division of CCMT

1st January, 2015
Mumbai 400072



Transliteration and Pronunciation Guide

In the book, Devanāgarī characters are transliterated according to the scheme adopted by the International Congress of Orientalists at Athens in 1912. In it one fixed pronunciation value is given to each letter; f, q, w, x and z are not called to use. According to this scheme:

Devanāgarī	Translit- eration	Sounds Like	Devanāgarī	Translit- eration	Sounds Like
अ	a	son	द	dh	adhesive*
आ	ā	f <u>a</u> ther	ण	ṇ	u <u>nder</u> *
इ	i	d <u>i</u> fferent	त	t	t <u>a</u> bla
ई	ī	f <u>ee</u> l	थ	th	t <u>h</u> umb
उ	u	f <u>u</u> ll	द	d	t <u>h</u> is
ऊ	ū	b <u>oo</u> t	घ	dh	G <u>a</u> nd <u>h</u> i
ऋ	ṛ	r <u>h</u> ythm*	न	n	n <u>o</u> se
ॠ	ṝ	**	प	p	p <u>e</u> n
ऌ	ḷ	**	फ	ph	p <u>h</u> antom*
ए	e	ev <u>a</u> de	ब	b	b <u>o</u> il
ऐ	ai	del <u>i</u> ght	भ	bh	ab <u>h</u> or
ओ	o	c <u>o</u> re	म	m	m <u>i</u> nd
औ	au	n <u>o</u> w	य	y	y <u>e</u> s
क्	k	c <u>a</u> lm	र	r	r <u>i</u> ght
ख	kh	k <u>h</u> an	ल	l	l <u>o</u> ve
ग	g	g <u>a</u> te	व	v	v <u>e</u> ry
घ	gh	g <u>h</u> ost	श	ś	s <u>h</u> ut
ङ	ṅ	an <u>k</u> le*	ष	ṣ	s <u>u</u> gar
च	c	ch <u>u</u> ckle	स	s	s <u>i</u> mple
छ	ch	w <u>i</u> tc <u>h</u> *	ह	h	h <u>a</u> ppy
ज	j	ju <u>st</u> ice	ॠ	m̐	im <u>p</u> ro <u>v</u> ise
झ	jh	J <u>h</u> ansi	:	ḥ	**
ञ	ñ	ban <u>y</u> an	क्ष	kṣ	ac <u>t</u> ion
ट	ṭ	t <u>a</u> nk	त्र	tr	t <u>h</u> ree*
ठ	ṭh	**	ज्ञ	jñ	gn <u>o</u> sis
ड	ḍ	d <u>o</u> g	ऽ	'	a silent 'a'

* These letters don't have an exact English equivalent. An approximation is given here.

** These sounds cannot be approximated in English words.



Message Divine

(Two words on *Kaṭhopanīṣad*)

Sadguru Śrī Swami Tapovan Mahārāja

Kaṭhopanīṣad is perhaps the clearest of all the ten classical Upaniṣads. Upaniṣad means Brahnavidyā, that is, the knowledge of Brahman. *Kaṭhopanīṣad* explains Brahnavidyā most clearly, most vividly, and repeats the essentials without making the subject complicated by unconsciously mixing up upāsanās with it as almost all the other Upaniṣads do. It goes on adding colour after colour in its description of the pure Ātman, which is Brahman, the only Reality. The root cause of all the miseries and calamities of this world is ignorance (avidyā). By instinct or by intellect a man thinks that he is the body. This is ignorance. ‘Body’ cannot be the meaning of ‘I’. I am Ātman, ever shining, everlasting, eternal, pure Consciousness. To understand Ātman in such a way by intellectual thinking and discrimination, and to experience it by clear perception and Realisation, is called Knowledge. This Self-knowledge – this Ātmavidyā – was demanded by Naciketā, and Yamarāja explained it in a simple style, adopting different methods. This constitutes the whole text.

स मोदते मोदनीयं हि लब्ध्वा

sa modate modanīyaṁ hi labdhvā – *Kaṭhopanīṣad*-1.2.13

Having attained the blissful Ātman, he becomes happy.

Ātman is of the nature of eternal Bliss. The only source of happiness is Ātman. And that Ātman is one's own Self. It is already attained. Therefore, Its attainment is nothing but to know It. It is not to be attained or enjoyed as an object, like a mango or an apple. Ātman, the pure Caitanya, is ever luminous in all Its glory in this body. The man of ignorance does not know It though he is doing all his actions by that Caitanya. Therefore, Mother Śruti says with wonder and sorrow –

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत

uttiṣṭhata jāgrata prāpya varānnibodhata

– Kaṭhōpaniṣad-1.3.14

Arise! Awake! Sitting at the feet of Mahātmās, the Realised souls, know It! Realise It!

This knowledge of Ātman, the destroyer of ignorance, is being discussed again and again in the *Kaṭhōpaniṣad* and can be easily understood and fully realised by an intelligent and faithful aspirant who is hearing and studying it. The knowledge – I am eternal and ever blissful Brahman; I am beyond this body, senses and mind – which a man acquires by simply hearing the Upaniṣad cannot be perfect and, therefore, would produce no great result. Incessant flow of remembrance of Ātman in the mind that 'I am pure, blissful, birthless and deathless Ātman' like the continuous flow of the Ganga is called perfect Knowledge (jñāna) which alone can destroy ignorance (avidyā) and give perpetual peace.

Even an ikkā¹ driver who attends some lecture of Vedānta on the roadside can have the knowledge of the Ātman for a moment. Though he hears that he is Ātman, he cannot think of it again for himself, as his mind is so deeply rooted in his body and body idea. Ātman idea or Self-knowledge has no place in his mind. His greedy and lustful mind with hundreds of desires, hatreds, ambitions and anxieties cannot think of the Ātman continuously even for a few moments without having the body consciousness, 'I-ness' and 'my-ness'. It burns and boils in the waters of his clinging attachments (tṛṣṇā). Ātman can be thought of, realised and remembered only by a calm, quiet and concentrated mind and not by a greedy, anxious and wavering mind.

If those who hear the discourses on the *Kāthopaniṣad* are intelligent, they can have an idea of the Self, that is, they can acquire an intellectual estimate of the Ātman in their understanding. But one cannot be an Ātmavit – a Realised soul – by such a knowledge of the Self. Because that knowledge is not perfect; it is only a conditioned knowledge of Ātmā. If the mind of the hearer is faithful, pure, concentrated and calm, then only it can realise and get established in pure Knowledge (jñāna) by continuous remembrance of the Ātman. Therefore, the hearers of Vedānta who want to acquire perfect jñāna, which alone can eliminate ignorance and give eternal peace and happiness, must have a pure, calm and concentrated mind. Hence the mantra definitely advises –

नाविरतो दुश्चरितात् नाशान्तो नासमाहितः ।
नाशान्तमानसो वापि प्रज्ञानेनैवमाप्नुयात् ॥

¹ a horse driven carriage

*nāvirato duṣcaritāt nāśānto nāsamāhitaḥ,
nāśānta-mānaso vā'pi prajñānenainam-āpnuyāt.*

– *Kaṭhōpaniṣad-1.2.24*

One who is indulged always in vicious actions, and desirous of various sensual enjoyments, and who has got no concentrated mind cannot attain Ātman through Knowledge.

This is the reason why renunciation (vairāgya) is considered as an unavoidable sādhanā for Brahma-jñāna everywhere in Vedānta. Vairāgya can destroy all sorts of desire-dirts and make the mind pure. No other Upaniṣad has so clearly described the full and true nature of healthy vairāgya as *Kaṭhōpaniṣad* has done. Naciketā, the glorious student of Brahmayidyā in *Kaṭhōpaniṣad*, was an embodiment of vairāgya.

No such great adhikārī for Brahmayidyā is ever so exhaustively narrated anywhere in the whole Upaniṣad literature –

तवैव वाहास्तव नृत्यगीते ॥

tavaiva vāhāstava nṛtyagīte. – Kaṭhōpaniṣad-1.1.26

You may keep yourself these carriages, these singing and dancing girls.

This was the prompt and immediate reply to his Ācārya, Lord Death, when these things of sensual enjoyment were offered to him. Yamarāja utterly failed in his attempt to make Naciketā covetous. By vairāgya and by practising meditation, one's mind becomes slowly concentrated. Concentration of

mind is absolutely necessary for the direct perception and realisation of the Self.

By attaining Yoga, the concentration of mind, one can realise the Paramātmān and get established in the eternal Bliss – the absolute perfection – beyond all pleasure and pain. What is the nature of the yoga which is described here, as the unavoidable sādhanā for the Brahmajñāna? Śruti very clearly says –

यदा पञ्चावतिष्ठन्ते ज्ञानानि मनसा सह ।
बुद्धिश्च न विचेष्टति तामाहुः परमां गतिम् ॥
तां योगमिति मन्यन्ते स्थिरामिन्द्रियधारणाम् ।

*yadā pañcā-vatiṣṭhante jñānāni manasā saha,
buddhiśca na viceṣṭati tāmāhuḥ paramāṁ gatim.
tām yogamiti manyante sthirām-indriya-dhāraṇām,*

– Kaṭhapaniṣad-2.3.10,11

When the five senses and mind become controlled and the intellect also becomes steady, then that stage is the highest, and that is called ‘Yoga’ by the great yogīs of the past.

Though ancient ṛṣis called this – sthirām-indriya-dhāraṇām – the control of the outer senses and the inner mind – as ‘yoga’ and though this is the real Yoga which leads us to Self-realisation, perfection and eternal Bliss, the word ‘yoga’ is nowadays greatly misunderstood by the Eastern and the Western book readers. They think that ‘yoga’ means some occult powers and superhuman strength of the body and the senses. The exaggerated descriptions of the power of

kuṇḍalinī and its awakening in the books on yoga make them eager to become a yogī. They want no realisation of the Self. They never practise yoga for Self-realisation. Real Yoga is concentration of mind, according to the Upaniṣads and that is to be practised and attained by a spiritual aspirant.

As there is no possibility of realising the Ātman without vairāgya and without concentration of mind, every aspirant must try to acquire these two at any cost. This is what the above mantra in *Kaṭhōpaniṣad* means to say. Therefore, first of all, be good, do good actions like the worship of God, like meditation upon His form, constant remembrance of Him and so on, and thus purify the mind. Practise upāsanā also; that is, do japa and meditation upon the form and qualities of a personal God. By practising selfless service and upāsanā, the wavering state of mind will end, and the mind will become gradually purified. Then you will be able to undoubtedly realise the Ātman, and thereafter come to live in the Ātman which you have intellectually understood by attending the discourses on *Kaṭhōpaniṣad*.

Never be satisfied by simply attending and hearing the discourses of Vedānta. Intellectual knowledge of the Ātman is only the first stage. Do not think that it is the last and the final stage. Many ladders you have to climb on after the acquisition of this intellectual knowledge if you must have the bright vision and the blissful experience of the Ātman. That is the supreme Brahmanvidyā which the *Kaṭhōpaniṣad* teaches us. Try to reach that final stage by performing continuously severe spiritual sādhanās. Never feel contented with the preliminary intellectual knowledge of the supreme Self in you. Strive to become and be.

Blessings

Lectures are all good and clear and highly useful to a beginner in jñāna-yoga. Philosophically also there is no contradiction in your utterances with the great and accredited principles of 'advaita thought'.

With love and best wishes.

Swami Tapovanam

Unprecedented

Upaniṣad-yajña, lectures and pamphlet distribution, immediate reproduction of the lectures – this is a unique feature – unprecedented in the annals of Indian history.

May Lord Bless you,

With regards,
Prem & Om
Swami Sivananda







Perface to the Revised Edition

Kaṭhōpaniṣad, one of the major Upaniṣads, expounds a great truth, very simply, as to what happens to the soul after death. It is in the form of a dialogue between the God of Death (Yama) and Naciketā, a Brāhmaṇa boy of just nine summers. Its importance can very well be gauged from the fact that many of its mantras are reproduced, in toto, in the *Bhagavad-gītā* – a later composition.

In this revised edition diacritical marks are used for transliteration of Sanskrit words in the verses. In the ‘free translation’ section normal fonts are used for Sanskrit words also.

The English plural sign ‘s’ has been added to untranslated Sanskrit words to show that it is not elemental to the words, for example, mantras, Vedas, ṛṣis and so on. Macrons are used on the last letter, for example, ‘ā, ī’ of such words to lengthen the sound in consonance with the pronunciation.

To be true to the Sanskrit text in transliteration, we have used ‘Brāhmaṇa’ for the first varṇa instead of the commonly used word ‘Brāhmin’. It need not be confused with the term ‘Brahman’ of the Vedāntins.

This Upaniṣad has two chapters containing three vallīs each. Some publications assign numbers one to three to vallīs

in each chapter, while others give continuous numbers to vallī from one to six encompassing both the chapters. We have adopted the latter.

A key to the transliteration and pronunciation is added in the beginning and an alphabetical index to mantras at the end of the book.

Publishers





Introduction

It was indeed a novel idea worked out for the first time on such a large scale, in the field of dissemination of spiritual knowledge – the 100 days' Upaniṣad jñāna-yajña held in Pune. Śrī Swami Chinmayananda came to Pune and for a hundred successive days daily conducted morning classes of Śrī Śāṅkarabhāṣya and in the evening for two hours daily engaged a cosmopolitan crowd of educated men with his illuminating discourses upon the mantras in *Kenopaniṣad*. The discourses were orthodox and yet so modern was the treatment that Śrī Swamiji was able to attract both the paṇḍitas as well as the educated class in the city.

The discourses were taken down and later on they were edited and brought out in weekly reports under the title yajña prasāda. These were distributed free, each week, to more than twelve hundred seekers and aspirants all over the world. Seven such issues of the yajña prasāda were brought out, in which the entire discourses given out upon the *Kenopaniṣad* were reported.

Later on we were compelled to stop the publication due to lack of funds, and we could not even come out with any direct appeal to the public as Śrī Swamiji would not have any such begging. To Swami Chinmayananda it was Lord's own work, and the funds necessary should come of their own

accord. Thus, we were compelled to stop the yajña prasāda publication as a kindergarten lesson ‘Working in His will’, as Swamiji used to term it!

To this land of Śrī Jñāneśvara and Saint Tukārāma came Swami Chinmayananda with a mere four-and-a-half-annas to conduct a 100 days’ yajña! Śrī Swamiji had not many friends in this city, and those who were known to him had already written to inform the Swami that he was not to come as such a long session of yajña was not possible to be undertaken by anyone of them!! Yet, the Swami came! The story of what he accomplished here under our very eyes was in itself a miracle of Lord's grace working through one of His chosen instruments.

And if such a jñāna-yajña was unprecedented in the recent history of India, and if, never before, the modern age with its machines, was ever brought so effectively in the sevā of the devotees of Vedānta living all round the globe, we, in Pune must feel ourselves thrice blessed in the fact Śrī Swamiji chose this puṇya nagara as the venue for this sacred yajña and we were able to take part in it so intimately.

Swamiji’s speed of delivery was a test to even the best stenographers here. There was a magnetic charm in his compelling sincerity and in the powerful actions with which the vision of the goal of life was pointed out to us by him. The number of visitors increased day by day, and even those who came with no intentions more sacred than to scoff remained the most regular devotees of Vedānta throughout the yajña season. Those who came later on only regretted for the days lost by them!

In short, there never was such a spiritual guide who had visited any city to conduct such a long session of discourses and yet held the audience in the grip of enthusiasm and charm all along.

We can quote here a hundred instances where Śrī Swamiji had effected almost a revolution in individual character. The number of young men here who are now engaged in regular practices in the spiritual path of self purification and self-improvement are not few. Unlike the flying visitations of great souls and personalities, who come only to generate a flash of 'good resolve' in the bosom of the people, which dies away before the sage or saint gets down the pulpit, the spiritual awakening accomplished by Śrī Swami Chinmayananda is perceptibly more enduring and deep.

From his present retreat (in Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand, Himalayas), Śrī Swami Chinmayananda is helping all the aspirants and seekers with his saintly advices upon their individual problems, through prompt replies to all their enquiring letters.

Kāthopaniṣad is a volume containing the salient points of the discourses given out by Śrī Swamiji upon its mantras during the yajña. We do not expect that the Pune devotees, who had heard the Swami would ever congratulate this work as a complete success; nobody but Śrī Swamiji alone can satisfy them, for, where is the man who can be a successful editor to restate the words of a mastermind perfected at the feet of the two greatest living Masters today in India –

Śrī Swami Tapovan Mahārāja of Uttarkashi and Śrī Swami Sivananda Mahārāja of Rishikesh.

We shall feel satisfied and amply rewarded if this book is taken as a symbol of our devotion to and love for Śrī Swami Chinmayananda and as a token of our loyalty to the sacred status as members of the yajña committee to which we were appointed by the very grace of the Lord which also brought to us our revered guide and Teacher.

With crores of praṇāmas to the Lord of all hearts which is the essence in Thee,

Thy own,
Śrī M.M Naidu

Pune
June 1, 1952

Secretary
U.G. Yagña Committee, Pune





Chinmaya Salutes

Śrī M.M. Naidu Garu

Beloved Immortal Self,

Om namo Nārāyaṇāya!

Om namaḥ Śivāya!

Om Jai Saccidānanda

Salutations and adorations to the Self in thee which is the theme of the Upaniṣad!

Just received the manuscripts prepared for printing a report of the yajña discourses upon the *Kaṭhopanīṣad* mantras. It is a brilliant attempt made. Chinmaya salutes all the workers of Pune who had contributed their sincerity and devotion in preparing this report.

May the infinite grace of the Masters of the Upaniṣad be upon you all and may you all soon grow to become true propaganda agents in spreading the eternal message in the declarations of the Upaniṣad.

Hail, the sons of the ṛṣis. Live and love. You will reach the goal of perfection. A true Indian is a God-man, who has realised the Absolute, described in the Upaniṣads, the Bible of the Hindus.

With Prem and Praṇāmas,

Uttarkashi
21st June, 1952

Thy Own Self,
Chinmayananda





Kāthopaniṣad

Peace Invocation

ॐ सह नाववतु । सह नौ भुनक्तु ।
सह वीर्यं करवावहै ।
तेजस्वि नावधीतमस्तु । मा विद्विषावहै ।
ॐ शान्तिः! शान्तिः!! शान्तिः!!!

*om saha nāvavatu, saha nau bhunaktu,
saha vīryam karavāvahai,
tejasvi nāv-adhītam-astu, mā vidviṣā-vahai.
om śāntiḥ! śāntiḥ!! śāntiḥ!!!*

ॐ – symbol of the Para Brahman; सह – together; नौ – (both) us; अवतु – (let Him) protect; सह – together; नौ – (both) us; भुनक्तु – come to enjoy (bliss of Knowledge); सह – together; वीर्यं – effort; करवावहै – (let us both) do; तेजस्वि नौ – well studied; अधीतम्-अस्तु – what we study; मा – never; विद्विषावहै – quarrel with each other

Let Him protect us both. May He bless us with bliss of Knowledge. Let us exert together. May what we study, be well studied. May we not hate (quarrel with) each other.

Om Peace! Peace!! Peace!!!

This peace-verse gives us an idea of the team spirit in which the Teacher and the taught approached the business of teaching and learning.

In Brahma vidyā no progress is possible without the active cooperation of the Teacher and equally sincere co-operation of the taught. Hence, the special prayer ‘May we never quarrel with each other.’ This prayer seems to be specially imperative in the study of the scripture where the chances for wasteful and useless arguments are so many that they can lead us into the meshes of ruinous misunderstanding, understanding and non-understanding of the Śruti at every step.

Each day the Teacher and the pupil started and ended their lessons chanting this stanza of peace. Even today wherever the Śruti is taught, this practice is strictly followed.

Om! Om!! Om!!!





Chapter 1

प्रथमोऽध्यायः

Section 1 – प्रथमा वल्ली

The story of Naciketā in the House of Death

ॐ उशन्ह वै वाजश्रवसः सर्ववेदसं ददौ ।
तस्य ह नचिकेता नाम पुत्र आस ॥ १ ॥

*om uśan-ha vai vājaśravasaḥ sarvavedasaṁ dadau,
tasya ha naciketā nāma putra āsa. (1)*

ॐ – symbol of para Brahman; उशन्ह वै – desirous (of heavenly rewards); वाजश्रवसः – son of Vājaśravas; सर्ववेदसं – all that he possessed; ददौ – gave away; तस्य ह – to him; नचिकेता – Naciketā; नाम – by name; पुत्र – son; आस – there was (had)

1. Once desirous of heaven, the son of Vājaśravas (Gautama) gave away, in sacrifice, all that he possessed. He had a son Naciketā by name.

uśan (being desirous) – The opening word of the Upaniṣad declares the very basis of the religion of the Brāhmaṇas. The sacrifices and rituals are all performed for gaining some wish. The karma-kāṇḍa promises a temporary cure for the desire-pestilence in the bosom of man. But later on in the Upaniṣad,

we shall read of repeated advices to man to renounce desire and reach peace and bliss. There is again an insistence with which this Upaniṣad (2.6.14, 15) concludes – ‘When all desires are renounced the mortal becomes immortal and realises Brahman, even here.’

This is the traditional way of interpretation following Śaṅkarācārya’s commentary. Bhatta Bhāskara Miśra in his commentary on *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* interprets as ‘Uśan, the son of Vājaśravasa’ (uśan nāma vājaśravasaḥ putrah). This seems to be quite in order and more direct interpretation. We shall have then here baniyā (a trader) like name, making Uśan, Mr. Desirous, son of Vājaśravas.¹



त॑ह कु॒मार॑सन्तं दक्षिणासु नीयमानासु
श्रद्धाविवेश सोऽमन्यत ॥२॥

taṁha kumāraṁ santaṁ dakṣiṇāsu nīyamānāsu
śraddhāviveśa so’manyata. (2)

त॑ह – into him; कु॒मार॑ – son; सन्तं – being (though) good;
दक्षिणासु – (when) the presents; नीयमानासु – being distributed;
श्रद्धा – filial anxiety, reverential faith; आविवेश – entered; सः –
he; अमन्यत – thought

¹ Please note that verse 1, 2 and 4 are in prose and are an almost exact reproduction of the version of the story in *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*. Verses 3, 5 and 6 which report on the reflections of Naciketā are in metre as of the rest of the Upaniṣad and these reflections are not in the original Brāhmaṇa story.

2. When the presents were being distributed, filial anxiety, (about the welfare of his father) entered the heart of Naciketā, who was still a boy and he thought...

The very opening stanza of this inimitable Upaniṣad gives us the intimate information about the parentage and pedigree of the hero, Naciketā. Indeed Naciketā was not an ill-bred, low born, unwanted child. His grandfather was Vājaśrava, meaning one who has become famous by his distribution of food in charity. The son of Vājaśrava, the father of Naciketā is now in the story here, engaged in the performance of a great sacrifice called Viśvajit, in which the performer has to give away in charity all that he possesses. This was generally performed by the kings of old when they, after conquering kingdoms, victoriously return to their own capitals. Again, householders in the past used to perform this yajña before they renounced everything and entered the order of sannyāsa. It was no mean achievement for an individual if he could perform this Viśvajit-yajña. Thus, Naciketā was born of a great father, himself a son of greater grandfather. Hence the cultural purity of the student is hinted here by Mother Śruti.

There is no stanza in this section which is not adding some definite strokes to the expression in the hero's portrait! In the very second stanza though it is only a mere statement of fact, the word 'śraddhā' is very expressive. Śraddhā in Sanskrit is so expressive a word, pregnant with such sacred suggestions, that it is almost impossible to translate it into any European language. The best translation that this sādhu has come across is 'faith or belief in the existence of a future state of existence.'

In the very first reading, this translation may look as though it is too far-fetched. Śrī Śaṅkarācārya's commentary explains to us the term 'śraddhā' as 'an unswerving faith in the words of the teachers, in the teachings of the scriptures and in the dictates of one's own self.'

One of the main qualifications declared as necessary for a fit student has been the wealth of six great qualities; śraddhā is one of them. Without faith in a philosophy, no one can follow its dictates. The modern youngsters generally misinterpret faith as a certain blind belief and confidence in some supernatural power or force. In the sense in which they have come to mean śraddhā, certainly the word deserves all the condemnation they hurl at it. But śraddhā only means confidence or faith. As a matter of fact, nobody can do anything in this world without faith.

For example, supposing you eliminate entirely the concept of faith from your own make-up, then you will not be able to even walk out of this yajñaśālā and reach your home! Supposing you are an applicant for a job. Certainly, to begin with, you cannot have any previous experience! But you entertain a certain amount of confidence in yourself that, given a chance to work under favourable circumstances, you shall successfully carry out the work to the satisfaction of your employer. Without this faith no one exists in this material world even for a day. There are some who do not have this faith in themselves and they are either hysterical or even lunatics. They entirely lose their faith in themselves¹

¹ 'Faith is the resolution to stand or fail by noblest hypothesis.' – F. Myers.

and they dare not get up from the corner where they sit or, if at all they walk out, they walk round each tiny pebble to step safely over them since they have lost faith in themselves! In the world of philosophy also we must have, first of all, a faith in the Teacher, a faith in the scripture and above all a faith in ourselves, if we must live the philosophy and claim its blessings.

There is yet a more sacred implication in this term ‘overcome by faith’. Injunctions in all religions must have and they do have, a flexibility in themselves. This is perceptible in their golden ages. But soon they harden themselves into shells and caskets around the faithful, binding them with ‘must’ and ‘should’ rules.

Vājaśravas, the aged father seems to have not recognised the deeper significance of the Viśvajit sacrifice and he had fully adapted it according to his station in life and to the status and worth of the paṇḍitas. The sacrifices had become soulless and each a mechanical routine. Naciketā, the boy, having developed sufficient discrimination and daring to independently interpret the inner significance of the sacrifice was filled with faith and judged rightly the significance of what his father did.

We find here expressions of some historical facts – the frozen Brāhmaṇa injunctions and a silent revolt against them, which gave us the final fulfilment of the rituals in the philosophy of Truth as expounded in the Upaniṣads.



पीतोदका जग्धतृणा दुग्धदोहा निरिन्द्रियाः ।
अनन्दा नाम ते लोकास्तान्स गच्छति ता ददत् ॥३॥

*pītodakā jagdhatṛṇā dugdhadohā nirindriyāḥ,
anandā nāma te lokāstānsa gacchati tā dadat. (3)*

पीतोदका – (the cows that) have drunk water (for the last time);
जग्धतृणाः – eaten grass (for the last time); दुग्धदोहाः – have yielded
all their milk (and are now too old to yield any more); निरिन्द्रियाः
– barren (are unable to give birth anymore because of age);
अनन्दाः – joyless; नाम – verily; ते – those; लोकाः – worlds; तान् –
them; सः – he; गच्छति – goes; ता – them; ददत् – presents

*3. (These cows) have drunk water for the last time, eaten grass for
the last time, have yielded all their milk and are barren. Joyless
verily, are the worlds which he attains who gives these (dakṣiṇā)
presents (in yajña).*

This stanza is an example of the masterly poetry employed
in this Upaniṣad to bring forth the song of the soul. The deft
handling of the words to yield the maximum efficiency out
of a few but glorious chosen words is nowhere so clear as
in this stanza, where the four epithets, describing the cows
that were given away as presents, together give the reader a
full picture of their sad lot. Cows, that would no more drink
water nor would eat any more grass, so that naturally they
shall not be of any use to us even as much as for a ball of
cowdung! Again, they are so old that they would yield no
milk and many of them were barren and probably lame too!

The stanza, at the same time, is not a mere wasteful
indulgence merely for the word play. Śruti never indulges in

overtalking. Minimum words and maximum suggestiveness is the style of Upaniṣads. In this stanza too, besides the poetry of it all, there is a definite purpose accomplished, namely, throwing one more shade and stroke into the picture of Naciketā. That the boy of nine years was able to quote the śāstras and say that the performers of sacrifices who become stingy and miserly in their gifts to the priests, would reach joyless worlds, clearly shows that Naciketā was not an illiterate, but on the other hand, was a student well versed in the text of the śāstras.



स होवाच पितरं तत कस्मै मां दास्यसीति ।
द्वितीयं तृतीयं तं होवाच मृत्यवे त्वा ददामीति ॥४॥

*sa hovāca pitaraṁ tata kasmai mām dāsyasīti,
dvitīyaṁ tṛtīyaṁ taṁ hovāca mṛtyave tvā dadāmi. (4)*

स ह – he; उवाच – said; पितरं – unto, sire; तत – O father; कस्मै – to whom; मां – me; दास्यसि इति – will you give; द्वितीयं – for the second; तृतीयं – for third time; तं – to him; होवाच – said; मृत्यवे – unto death; त्वां – thee; ददामि – I give; इति – thus

4. He said unto his sire, "Father to whom wilt thou give me?" He said this again and again; and again for the third time (when the enraged father) said, "Unto Death do I give thee."

Through the trellis of the chistled words of this Upaniṣad no reader can afford to look for and miss the vivid picture of the home of Gautama with his courtyard crowded by the

hundreds of priests assembled there to receive presents. The melancholy team of cows is being led in and the father is busy distributing them to the ṛtviks (priests who officiate in yajñas). In the veranda of the house, there stands the child Naciketā visibly upset with his own confusions within. He is anxious that his father who is performing the yajña with desire (uśan) should attain its fulfilment. But in his knowledge of the śāstras he knew that the sacrifice called Viśvajit would be fully potent only when the performer sacrifices everything that he possesses. But somehow due to some sense of attachment and delusory feeling of proprietorship, the old man has decided to make small compromise between injunctions of the śāstras and his own ego-prompted impulses. In this inner conflict of Vājaśravas, so clearly indicated by his external actions, Naciketā reads a sure tragedy in store for the father in future.

The young boy, overcome by his sense of duty towards his father, walks up to the old man who is busily engaged in the distribution of the cows, and enquires of him, “Father, to whom wilt thou give me?”

The yajña performed being Viśvajit, the performer is bound to give away in charity all that he owns as his own. Naturally, the son approaches the father offering himself as a happy sacrifice. Certainly, no father has a right to give away his son without his consent merely to gain for himself a greater realm of experience. After all, as an individual with independent life, the son has a right to demand his own privileges as the son of his father. Naciketā, in thus offering himself to his father, is surrendering his individual rights at

the altar of his greater duties towards his parent. Or may be, it was an intelligent hint suggesting a volume of criticism at the father's suicidal miserliness exhibited so shamelessly at a moment of challenge in his life.

The old Brāhmaṇa, though intellectually a great Master of the scriptures, is in no sense of the term a 'saint' or a 'sage' who has transcended the misty realm of self-confusing thoughts and self-debasing temptations. Were he a saint he would not have stooped to conduct this very yajña by desire (uśan).

There is in him evidently a terrible sense of attachment even to his wealth. Naturally, Naciketā fears that his father may not sacrifice his only son, under the cloak of assumed righteousness and the high sounding ideology in that no father has the right over his son's life to sacrifice it for fulfilling his own personal ambitions.

You need not consider this as a very far fetched interpretation. Human mind is capable of even greater self-deceptions. When a challenge comes in life, we yield to the temptation knowing fully well that we have fallen from the heights of perfections which we have chosen to follow, and in all such cases our mind is a faithful ally to sabotage us from within and always provides us with irrefutable Goebbel-like monstrous falsehoods to justify our own lapses!

To the old man, the young boy's insistence was unbearable. At first the father ignored the repetition; probably the old man might have scolded the boy and ordered him, 'Shut up'. But, on repeating for the third time,

in sheer despair and disgust at the nuisance, the father in a harmless curse burst out, 'Unto Death do I give thee.'

Certainly, we shall not understand the words to have any real significance in the mouth of the father; it was only an outburst of his annoyance at the priggish son. A Brāhmaṇa who cannot give in dakṣiṇā anything more useful than useless, old and barren cows cannot be expected to have the large heart and the true spirit of charity to offer his only son as an oblation to Lord Death.



बहूनामेमि प्रथमो बहूनामेमि मध्यमः ।
किंस्विद्यमस्य कर्तव्यं यन्मयाद्य करिष्यति ॥५॥

*bahūnāmemeṁi prathamō bahūnāmemeṁi madhyamaḥ,
kiṁśvid-yamasya kartavyaṁ yanmayādyā kariṣyati. (5)*

बहूनाम् – of many (sons and disciples); एमि – I go (hold rank); प्रथमः – first; बहूनाम् – of many; एमि – I go (hold rank); मध्यमः – midmost; किंस्वित् – what might be; यमस्य – of Yama (Lord Death); कर्तव्यं – to do (duty); यत् – which; मया – by me; अद्य – now; करिष्यति – can do

5. (Naciketā thought), 'Among many, I go the first; of many I go midmost (meaning I was never a third rate); what is there for Yama (Lord Death) to do which he now can do by (from) me (who is thus given to Yama)?'

The stanza is the inner soliloquy of a perfect Āryan child, born and bred upon the sacred milk of the Vaidika culture.

When the father has thus exiled him from this plane of consciousness into the realms of death, Naciketā retires from the presence of his preoccupied father to ponder over and digest the circumstances. This is a true sign of matured soul. No grown-up intellect will allow itself to be clouded and confused at the mere approach of challenging circumstances. It will neither allow emotion to flay its wild pranks and act in a maddening impulsive way, nor will such an intellect allow itself to be cowed down by the threatening aspect of the challenge and run away from its fields of activity into a cowardly retreat of inertia and dumbfoundedness. Here is Naciketā unexpectedly bombed by a most surprising development around and about him, in the external world of his relationships. And like a true matured intellect, he quietly retires to ponder over, to analyse, to discriminate and to judge.

In that quietude he gains balance by a reference to his knowledge of the ever truthful śāstras and the sacred words of the learned Masters. It is an injunction of śāstra and an Āryan code of morality, that the duty of a disciple or a son is to be ever implicitly in the sevā of his Teacher or his father. With reference to the execution of duty to a Guru, the disciples are classified under three heads – (a) the best, (b) the so-so and (c) the bad. The ‘best’ ones are those who, knowing the wish of the Guru, always serve him; the ‘so-so’ are those who are infallibly obedient and execute any order from the Guru when expressly commanded; and the ‘bad’ ones are those despicable wretches who fail to execute even when commanded by the Guru. Here, in our story, Gautama was to Naciketā both father and Guru in one. Hence these words from the son-disciple, Naciketā.

With reference to the above injunction of śāstra we shall now easily understand what exactly was in the mind of Naciketā when he thought as in the stanza now under discussion. He meant to say that he was ever diligent to act up to the expectations of his Guru and parent: that in some cases, now and then, he had slipped down to ‘the so-so’ category when he could not understand the wish of his Guru for the moment and could not, therefore, execute it before the Guru’s expressed command. In short, Naciketā confesses that he has never been consciously or unconsciously of the last type and that he never hopes now to become one by disobeying a command expressed by his father and Guru.

The boy knew that his father never meant what he said. But no compromise is sanctioned or allowed in Sanātana-dharma śāstra. Moral and ethical codes of living are to be followed, if at all, in toto and as such, to add our own conditions and interpretations to it, is to prostitute dharma openly and serve our sensuous nature. Rank adharmas is far better than compromised dharma practised with insincerity.

The tomb of Mother India has been opened up with the spades of such distorted practices of the eternal dharmas by the Hindus. Had we, as a nation, the brutal animal courage to be outright adharmīs, we would have been today, probably, far better, at least in our material life! Neither have we the spiritual heroism to walk the path of dharma nor have we the flesh fleshy daring to be adharmīs. Compromising ourselves in our womanly cowardice, we have been playing the calamitous game of living two contradictory ideas – dharma like adharmas and adharma like dharmas.

Naciketā knew this and he dared not compromise. Dharma is too sacred for him. It is a blasphemy to attempt to reconcile to our convenience, the eternal values of Truth with the passing values of false temptations. And hence, Naciketā wondered, ‘What is the great work that will be accomplished by Yama through me, who am thus sent forth by my father?’ Herein there is a sacred tip for all true aspirants who are seeking their goal of life. Naciketā certainly knew that his father never meant what he said.

But his father was also his Guru and a Guru’s words are never futile.

Many are the stories in our treasure houses of Purāṇas which indicate how even a passing word of a great Master has come true in the end. There is nothing strange in it. It ought to be so. When a radio is tuned up to Delhi centre and if that radio sings, it cannot but be the songs sung in the Delhi broadcasting room. A radio is incapable of making its own noises. Similarly, a God-man, who in his realised self-perfection has totally tuned himself to That, will not and cannot express himself in futile words. All his thoughts are the thoughts of the total mind. His words are always the immutable words of the divine will. This ought to be the intelligent understanding of every disciple if he is to profit himself by the grace of a Guru in the spiritual field. Naciketā, true to this Eternal Principle, acts upon the words of his Guru, though they were but unmeant words spoken in the heat of the moment by a father to a son. And yet, ultimately, the great student comes to the greatest of wealth and achievement at the feet of Lord Death.

The words, 'What will be the work of Yama which he has to do unto me' are the expressed form of speech which indicates the ethereal atmosphere of the thought behind! The young boy has divinely determined to follow strictly the path as advocated by the textbooks of dharma. The wonderment in him is but an anxious impatience to peep into the future and to come to witness what is the great mission that is to be fulfilled by the Lord Death through him, for his Guru's words can never be in vain.



अनुपश्य यथा पूर्वे प्रतिपश्य तथापरे ।
सस्यमिव मर्त्यः पच्यते सस्यमिवाजायते पुनः ॥६॥

*anupaśya yathā pūrve pratipaśya tathāpare,
sasyamiva martyaḥ pacyate sasyam-ivājāyate punaḥ. (6)*

अनुपश्य – remember; यथा – how; पूर्वे – our forefathers (those who came before us); प्रतिपश्य – consider; तथा – thus; अपरे – others (sages and holy men of the day); सस्यम् इव – like corn; मर्त्यः – mortal; पच्यते – decays (ripens and falls); सस्यम् – corn; इव – like; आजायते – born; पुनः – again

6. 'Remember how our forefathers acted. Consider also, how others now act. Like corn, decays the mortal and like corn, is born again.'

This stanza is directly addressed to the father by the son. It contains in the essence the wisdom of all the Śrutis and the cream of the entire Sanātana-dharma. The stanza indicates the

inevitable philosophy of rebirth, which is the very backbone of the Hindu faith.

This ought to be sane conclusion arrived at by every honest thinker if he were to analyse the wherefrom and the wherefore of life. Had it not been for the karma done in the past, there should not have been so much differences among those who are living now. A boy born to a leper has to suffer, from his very birth, the sorrows of this despicable disease! At the same time elsewhere, in the palace a child is born to wear the crown and to enjoy the kingdom! Why?

If we are to assume that this life has started directly from Him, then we will be forced to assume that the Creator, in His omnipotence and might, is a tyrant, and like any mortal king dispenses his favours according to his whim and fancy, sometimes justly and often unjustly, always partial and inconsistent. He is no God at whose feet a devotee can offer his heart of love in total surrender and devotion. And there is no religion in the world wherein we have the conception of a God who is cruel, partial, unjust and mad in his lustful powers!

The stanza now under review hints at the sublime truth that our present existence is not a mere accidental happening but is a measured link, shaped out by ourselves, which makes the chain of life complete, connecting the dead past with the unborn future. These words indicate not only that there were many incarnations taken by the 'ego' in us in the past, but also that it shall again continue manifesting in numberless incarnations in the future too. In short, the present life in this form upon the earth is but an incident in the eternal existence of the soul.

Generations after generations come upon the surface of the earth, feed themselves, grow to maturity, breed their kind and die away yielding their place to the new crowd of the latest generation! This idea has been here expressed in this unforgettable metaphor taken from the birth, growth and decay of the seasonal weeds. Weeds grow up during the rainy season and soon thrive themselves to flower forth, and, in a couple of months, they fulfil themselves in their seeds and die away. So too man must yield his place for his children to flourish.

Naciketā is here hinting to his father that life must necessarily end after a period of existence and that compared to the endless time, the lifespan of an individual ego living on this globe is but momentary. The general import suggested is that when life is so fleeting why should one stoop down to perpetrate adharma, tempted by one's own delusions and false attachments? This is indeed a very strong argument raised by the son to help his father to come to a final decision and allow the youngster to leave for the palace of death, and thus, thereby fulfil the idler words of the father.

Besides, Naciketā discusses with his father the correct way of discriminating between dharma and adharma during moments of high tensions in life. Many are the moments when a faithful seeker feels lost on the path of life not knowing what is dharma and what is adharma. At such moments of Arjuna-sthiti, the advice that the Śruti gives us is, 'Remember how our forefathers acted; consider also how others (sages and holy men of the day) now act.'

This is a very significant advice which is to be noted by all true seekers. At moments of moral and ethical challenges in our lives, it is not always possible for all of us to keep cool and bring our senses of judgement and discrimination to work out the pros and cons, and to provide us with a final verdict as to the right mode of action which we are to pursue. Here is, then, the practical tip for the aspirant. At such moments we are to consider how the great Masters of old acted under similar circumstances. May be the occasion that has arisen for us to react is one which was unknown in the days of yore. For example, travelling in a crowded tram is certainly an occasion possible today but a parallel of which we may miss in the records of the past. And so how to act in a tram or what are the dharmas to be followed in a tram are to be known and copied from those noble ones who are living and acting today, 'Consider also how others act now.'

Thus, with a reference to the chaste actions of the great ones of the past and the present, we can always instruct ourselves upon what is good and what is bad.



वैश्वानरः प्रविशत्यतिथिर्ब्राह्मणो गृहान् ।
तस्यैतां शान्तिं कुर्वन्ति हर वैवस्वतोदकम् ॥७॥

*vaiśvānaraḥ praviśatyatithir-brāhmaṇo gṛhān,
tasyaitāṁ śāntim kurvanti hara vaivasvatodakam. (7)*

वैश्वानरः (इव) – like fire; प्रविशति – enters; अतिथिः – guest; ब्राह्मणः – Brāhmaṇa; गृहान् – house; तस्य – to him; एतां – these; शान्तिं –

quieten; कुर्वन्ति – they do; हर – fetch; वैवस्वत – O Vaivasvata (son of Vivasvān i.e. the Sun); उदकम् – water

7. A Brāhmaṇa guest enters a house like fire. Men give this (water) to quieten him. O Vaivasvata! Fetch water.

Between the previous stanza and the present, there is a dramatic silence which is to be supplemented from our knowledge of the same story as narrated in the karma-kāṇḍa portion of the Veda; therein, however, it was a formless voice that directed the boy to the palace of Death. Naciketā, comforting the father and persuading him to act up to the high ideals in which the true Āryans ever walked in the past, left his home and entered the domain of Death. There he arrived at the portico of Death and the boy had to wait for three days and nights, since Lord Death was then 'out of station'.

At this juncture Chinmaya pauses to answer some gross doubts raised by some of the hasty readers. Some enquire, 'How exactly could mortal child enter at will the world of Death?' Some others ask, 'Did the child visit the kingdom of Dharmarāja in his physical body or in his subtle body?' The absurd questions array themselves in the same uniform tone and to repeat them all would be to parade too long a list of pithless doubts.

Such questions can suggest themselves only to an unsympathetic head and heart. This is, after all a story, the main purport of which is not to discuss how far mortals can, at will, travel into the realms of the dead, but it is meant to bring a great student of life and a burning seeker of Truth to

a mastermind, Lord Death Himself. To wander away from the story into the labyrinth of such futile enquiries is to miss the greater purpose of the Upaniṣad.

No comparison is to be understood to be effective in all its details. If a poet describes the face of Miss Saroj and compares it with the moon, it does not mean that she had a face which is geometrically circular and contains in its very centre some dark patches! Such unsympathetic readers should avoid reading poetry and take to mathematics textbooks to engage their leisure hours; for not only would they find no education in poetry but shall ruin the very poetry they read!

Lord Death was not at home and the disciple had to wait three days and live through a self-imposed discipline of fasting. Here again, it is meaningless to wonder if such a thing was ever possible, when the consorts of Death were there at home! The story wants us to understand only that a certain amount of self-discipline and self-control are to be practised by every seeker ere he can come to be blessed by the contact of a perfect Guru.

At the end of third day, Lord Death returns home and the stanza under review gives us the words of either his consorts or of the ministers.

A Brāhmaṇa guest is considered in our Hindu śāstras as a double edged weapon. We can avail of it either to cut open our paths clean out of the jungle of life or to destroy ourselves by ignoring him or by disobeying his right advices.

The comparison of a guest with fire is very appropriate inasmuch as in the Vaidika period, the worship of fire was the most common method for gaining merits for the hereafter. At the same time, fire can burn down the houses and bring sorrow and disaster to the householder. Also 'vaiśvānara' means 'belonging to all men'. This term has been used as many as sixty times in *Ṛg-veda* to indicate fire in all its aspects. One thing is to be noted here; in modern societies too, a cultured and educated guest is always respected and revered. The word 'Brāhmaṇa' in this connection means not the one who has come to claim it as an accidental privilege of birth, but as I said, it means 'one who has the necessary cultural purity and mental and intellectual powers manifested in him as an individual!'



आशाप्रतीक्षे संगतः सूनृतां च
इष्टापूर्ते पुत्रपशूँश्च सर्वान् ।
एतद्वृद्धे पुरुषस्याल्पमेधसो
यस्यानश्नन्वसति ब्राह्मणो गृहे ॥८॥

*āśāpratīkṣe saṅgataiḥ-sūnṛtāṁ ca
iṣṭāpūrte putrapaśūṁśca sarvān,
etad-vṛṇkte puruṣasyālpamedhaso
yasyaṇaśnan-vasati brāhmaṇo gr̥he. (8)*

आशा – hopes; प्रतीक्षे – expectations; संगतं – (merits gained in) company with good men; सूनृतां – friendly discourses; च – and; इष्टापूर्ते – secret sacrifices, charitable deeds and pious gifts; पुत्र

– son; पशू – cattle; च – and; सर्वान् – all; एतत् – this; वृद्धक्ते – are destroyed; पुरुषस्य – of the man; अल्पमेधसः – ignorant; यस्य – to whose; अनश्नन् – without taking food; वसति – stays; ब्राह्मणः – Brāhmaṇa; गृहे – in the house

8. Hopes and expectations, fruits of company with good men, merits of sweet and friendly discourses, beneficial results of sacred sacrifices, charitable deeds and pious gifts, sons and cattle – all these are destroyed in the case of an ignorant man, in whose house a Brāhmaṇa guest stays without taking food.

Not only in the simple houses of the mortals do we see the working of Sanātana-dharma, but even in the palace of Lord Death, śāstras are quoted and implicitly followed. This is a stanza which enumerates the consequences one will have to live through as a result of one's deliberate insults to a man of knowledge and culture.

Hopes and expectations are blasted in the life of one who insults a saintly guest. Here, āśā – 'hope' means 'wish for something unknown, such as heaven and so on' and pratikṣā – 'expectation' means 'looking forward to obtaining of a known object such as material wealth, relationship and so on.'

A householder who insults a saintly guest is called by the Śruti as an idiot (alpamedhasaḥ). If today we find in our society more folks who ignore charity and hospitality, in the language of the Śruti, we are a generation of idiots!

In the concept of Sanātana-dharma, a guest is an atithi – Nārāyaṇa or an embodiment of God. Feeding the guest with Nārāyaṇa bhāva is considered to be one of the five

great yajñas (pañcamahāyajña) which a householder has to perform daily for purposes of his future growth in the scales of his conscious evolution.



तिस्त्रो रात्रीर्यदवात्सीर्गृहे मे
अनश्नन्ब्रह्मन्नतिथिर्नमस्यः ।
नमस्तेऽस्तु ब्रह्मन्स्वस्ति मेऽस्तु
तस्मात्प्रति त्रीन्वरान्वृणीष्व ॥९॥

*tisro rātrīr-yadavātsīrgr̥he me
anaśnan-brahmannatithir-namasyaḥ,
namaste'stu brahman-svasti me'stu
tasmāt-prati trīn-varān-vṛṇīṣva. (9)*

तिस्त्रः – three; रात्रीः – night; यत् – as; अवात्सीः – thou have dwelt;
गृहे – in the house; मे – mine; अनश्नन् – without taking food;
ब्रह्मन् – O Brāhmaṇa; अतिथिः – a guest; नमस्यः – venerable; नमः
– prostrations; ते – unto thee; अस्तु – be; ब्रह्मन् – O Brāhmaṇa;
स्वस्ति – good; मे – to me; अस्तु – befall; तस्मात् – therefore; प्रति
– in return (for the three nights); त्रीन् – three; वरान् – boons;
वृणीष्व – you choose

9. Yama said, "O Brāhmaṇa! Thou, a venerable guest, hast dwelt in my house three nights without eating. Therefore, choose now three boons in return, O Brāhmaṇa! My prostrations unto thee. May good befall me."

The spirit of the stanza is the true spirit in which the Āryans accepted and followed their immortal Sanātana-dharma. As

a matter of fact, it is surprising that such a godly power as Lord Death himself should bow down in modesty in front of his guest, a boy merely nine years old and beg of him to pardon the host's indiscretions.

These are days when the governors themselves outrageously step over their own laws! No one would have found fault with the Lord Death for having ignored a guest when he was himself not at home; and yet herein we see Lord Death apologising for his unintentional misconduct and begging the Brāhmaṇa boy guest to accept, in return, an atonement in the form of three boons! If only men in power and might, men in position and status, were to be so straight in following the laws of dharma, others, the lesser ones, would not have dared to disobey them at all!!

Here there is also an undercurrent of compliment paid by Lord Death to the Brāhmaṇa boy. 'May good befall me' is a request which has been already sanctioned by the guest even before the householder has asked for it; since a highly cultured man of intellect and heart, a true Brāhmaṇa, is always won over by humble prostrations and due reverence shown. He is not the one to nourish a grudge for even an insult expressly shown!



शान्तसंकल्पः सुमना यथा स्या-
द्वीतमन्युर्गौतमो माभि मृत्यो ।
त्वत्प्रसृष्टं माभिवदेत्प्रतीत
एतत्त्रयाणां प्रथमं वरं वृणे ॥१०॥

*śāntasaṅkalpaḥ sumanā yathā syā-
dvītamanyur-gautamo mābhi mṛtyo,
tvatprasrṣṭam mābhivadet pratīta
etat trayāṇām prathamam varam vṛṇe. (10)*

शान्तसंकल्पः – be pacified; सुमना – be kind; यथा स्यात् – (let him) may be; वीतमन्युः – free from anger; गौतमः – (i.e Naciketā's father); मा – me; अभि – towards; मृत्यो – O Death; त्वत् – by you; प्रसृष्टं – sent away; मा – me; अभिवदेत् – may greet; प्रतीत – recognise me; एतत् – this; त्रयाणां – of the three (boons); प्रथमं – the first; वरं – boon; वृणे – I choose

10. Naciketā said, "O Lord of Death! As the first of the three boons, I choose that Gautama, my father, be pacified, be kind and free from anger towards me, and that he may recognise me and greet me, when I am sent away by Thee."

Though Lord Death has given the boy only three boons, he encashes the very first one in favour of his father. This action indeed clearly throws a lot of glorious light on the character and temperament of the boy. Though he is now in the higher realms of Death, he is, first and foremost, a dutiful son and so the very first boon is utilised in bringing peace and joy into the heart of his father. Naciketā wants his father to enjoy comfortable nights without regret of having sent his son to the abode of Death weighing heavy upon his conscience.

A loving consideration for the feelings of one's own parents and guardians is the beginning of an individual's expansion, which ends only when his mind can give an equal place for even the inanimate objects of the world!

A Man of Perfection is he, who, in his state of experienced godhood, has expanded to become the all and has come to feel for not only his own relations or countrymen, but equally for all; that is, such a perfect Master alone is a true citizen of the world with a perfect universal love. To achieve this acme of perfection, a sādḥaka must begin with a consideration and love, selfless and all giving, first towards his parents and relations.

These are days of cruel misunderstandings, when in the name of religion, people sedulously practise many a vulgarity. Of them none is so detrimental and sad as the misplaced enthusiasm with which youngsters, when they have made a mess of their life by unintelligently living a span of licentiousness and sensuous freedom, suddenly decide to run away from it into the open portals of sannyāsa. Such runaways and moral desperados cannot succeed in this highest vocation, called sannyāsa. They are ever misfit, not only in society for material life, but equally so in the jungle for spiritual seeking and steady self perfecting. In the character of Naciketā we have a clear warning against this misconception of ours.



यथा पुरस्ताद्भविता प्रतीत
औद्दालकिरारुणिर्मत्प्रसृष्टः ।
सुखंरात्रीः शयिता वीतमन्यु-
स्त्वां ददृशिवान्मृत्युमुखात्प्रमुक्तम् ॥ ११ ॥

*yathā purastād bhavitā pratīta
auddālakir-āruṇir-matprasṛṣṭaḥ,
sukhaṁ rātrīḥ śayitā vītamanyu-
stoām dadṛśivān-mṛtyumukhāt-pramuktam. (11)*

यथा – as; पुरस्तात् – before; भविता – will be; प्रतीत – will recognise;
औदालकिः – Auddālaki; आरुणिः – son of Aruṇa; मत् – from me;
प्रसृष्टः – released; सुखं – peacefully; रात्रीः – nights; शयिता – (will)
sleep; वीतमन्युः – free from anger; त्वां – you; ददृशिवान् – when
he sees; मृत्युमुखात् – from the jaws of Death; प्रमुक्तम् – released

11. "Through my favour, Auddālaki, Āruṇi (thy father), will recognise you and will be (possessed of affection) as before. When he sees you released from the mouth of death, will lose his anger, and will sleep peacefully at night."

In this stanza Lord Death is blessing the boy with the fulfilment of all demands in all their details.

Naciketā's father has four names as is evident from the page of this Upaniṣad, namely, Gautama, Auddālaki, Āruṇi and Vājaśravasa. He was the son of Uddālaka and an adopted child of Aruṇa.



स्वर्गे लोके न भयं किञ्चनास्ति
न तत्र त्वं न जरया बिभेति ।
उभे तीर्त्वाशनायापिपासे
शोकातिगो मोदते स्वर्गलोके ॥ १२ ॥

*svarge loka na bhayaṃ kiñcanāsti
na tatra tvaṃ na jarayā bibhēti,
ubhe tīrtvāśanāyāpipāse
śokātigo modate svargaloke. (12)*

स्वर्गे लोके – in heaven; न भयं – no fear; किञ्चन – whatsoever; अस्ति – there is; न – not; तत्र – there; त्वं – you are; न – nor; जरया – old age; बिभेति – they fear; उभे – both; तीर्त्वा – having crossed; अशनाया – hunger; पिपासे – thirst; शोकातिगो – above grief; मोदते – rejoices; स्वर्गलोके – in the heaven

12. In heaven, there is no fear whatsoever. You are not there (O Death!); nor do they (the inhabitants of heaven, that is, devas) fear old age there. Having crossed both hunger and thirst, one rejoices in heaven, being beyond grief.

In order to ask the second boon promised here, Naciketā is glorifying the life in the higher plane of Consciousness, called the heavens. In establishing the greatness of heaven, Naciketā adopts the method of comparing it with the sorrows of the world. Heaven is comparatively without fears, since life in that plane of Conscious-existence is longer compared to the fleeting span of existence in this mortal plane. Hence, Naciketā declares to Lord of Death, ‘You are not there’. This is not an absolute truth; even for those who live in the heavens there is mortality. Their career there ends when they exhaust the merits they had gained while they were living in the mortal plane.¹

Man has five stages to live through in life – birth, childhood, youth, old age and death. But the gods have only

¹ *Gītā*-9.21

the first three stages. And hence, Naciketā says, 'Nor, do they fear old age there.' Not only have they none of the pains of old age or death but also, they have neither the agonies of hunger and thirst under which the ordinary mortals suffer through their span of existence here.

It is interesting to note here that in the earlier period Death was not considered so ferocious and threatening, a Lord of bereavement, as in the later period. In earlier portions of the Vedas, Lord Death is considered as a guide who takes men to the door of heaven! By the time of the *Kaṭhōpaniṣad*, this bright and joyous faith has passed away.



स त्वमग्निं स्वर्ग्यमध्येषि मृत्यो
प्रब्रूहि त्वं श्रद्धधानाय मह्यम् ।
स्वर्गलोका अमृतत्वं भजन्त
एतद्वितीयेन वृणे वरेण ॥ १३ ॥

*sa tvamagniṁ svargyamadhyeṣi mṛtyo
prabrūhi tvaṁ śraddadhānāya mahyam,
svargalokā amṛtatvaṁ bhajanta
etad-dvitiyena vṛṇe vareṇa. (13)*

सः – that; त्वम् – thou; अग्निं – fire (sacrifice); स्वर्ग्यम् – that leads to heaven; अध्येषि – knowest; मृत्यो – O Death; प्रब्रूहि – explain; त्वं – thou; श्रद्धधानाय – full of faith; मह्यम् – to me; स्वर्गलोकाः – those who aim at the attainment of heaven (sacrificers); अमृतत्वं – immortality (of the devas); भजन्त – attain; एतत् – this (the

secret of that sacrificial fire); द्वितीयेन – by the second; वृणे – I pray for; वरेण – by the boon

13. O Death! Thou knowest the fire sacrifice which leads to heaven; explain that to me, for I am full of faith, that (fire) by which those who aim at the attainment of heaven, attain immortality. I pray for this as my second boon.

Here in this stanza Naciketā is asking of Lord Death the second of boons. The heavenly life that has been explained in the previous mantra is the demand of the greatest number of men striving in life. They dedicate their entire spiritual and religious work only to live at least a period of time in the heavens. In the name of these ignorant folks, Naciketā is now cashing in the second of his boons and asking Lord Death to give the secret knowledge regarding the karma that is to be done by a mortal in the world, so that, as a result of its reactions, he would come to gain the elysian pleasures of the heavens.

Herein we find Naciketā, an ideal and a fit student for religious growth and spiritual unfoldment, sacrificing the second of his boons in a spirit of dedication to the world at large! A true Hindu is one who will come to seek his own Liberation only when he has fulfilled his duties towards his own relations and to the generation in which he is living. Unless one has practised universal love sufficiently for long, one cannot expand oneself fully to contain the cause and essence of all the universes, the Lord or the Truth. Here in the life of Naciketā, Śruti wants to emphasise this point as a necessary prerequisite for a successful seeker.

In the mantra, Naciketā is requesting Lord Death to initiate him into the secret of the rituals by which the performer can reach 'immortality'. This is not to be construed as the true goal and aim of life, the godhood or immortality. To understand it thus would be against the fundamentals of Vedānta. Karma (selfless work) cannot procure for the performer, the supreme goal of life, for, if the Supreme were to be a product achievable through an action, then it would be a thing 'made' or 'born', and, as such, it shall be finite. The infinite or the eternal God Principle or Truth cannot be a product or the result of an action or actions done. Thus the word 'immortality' here is used in a relative sense; compared with the daily deaths in life, the longer periods of existence for each ego centre in the higher planes of the heavenly regions is the 'immortal'.



प्र ते ब्रवीमि तदु मे निबोध
स्वर्ग्यमग्निं नचिकेतः प्रजानन् ।
अनन्तलोकाप्तिमथो प्रतिष्ठां
विद्धि त्वमेतं निहितं गुहायाम् ॥ १४ ॥

*pra te bravīmi tadu me nibodha
svargyamagniṁ naciketaḥ prajānan,
anantalokāptimatho pratiṣṭhām
viddhi tvametaṁ nihitaṁ guhāyām. (14)*

प्र – well; ते – to thee; ब्रवीमि – I will tell; तत् – that; उ – verily; मे – from me; निबोध – learn; स्वर्ग्यम् – that leads to heaven; अग्निं – the

fire (sacrifice); नचिकेतः – O Naciketā; प्रजानन् – well knowing; अनन्तलोकसिम् – a means to the attainment of eternal heaven; अथो – and; प्रतिष्ठां – support (of the universe); विद्धि – know; त्वम् – you; एतं – this; निहितं – seated; गुहायाम् – in the cavity (of the heart of the learned)

14. *I know well the fire (sacrifice), O Naciketā! which leads to heaven and I will tell it to thee. Learn it from me. Know that it is the means of attainment of eternal heaven and also the support of the universe, and is seated in the cavity (of the heart of the learned).*

Here Lord Death is obliging the Brāhmaṇa boy with the blessing of the second boon, he requested. It is noteworthy that in the Vaidika period, instructions were always received directly from the Guru's mouth, and as such, the medium of education was not like that in our own times, through the medium of notes, and the leisurely mugging. This method of direct learning demands an acute intelligence and an extra capacity to concentrate on the part of the student and hence, Lord Death is warning his disciple, 'I will tell thee well, attend to me, learn it from me.' This preface would be redundant in the mouth of a modern professor and, probably, he will be hooted down as a mad crack if he were to start his lectures each day with a call to his student to attend well. Neither does the method of modern education warrant it, nor will the student of the present-day have the capacity to follow such an instruction. The epithets used are the deliberate attempts to praise the agnividya (the fire worship), in order that the passion-riddled and desire-prompted lesser souls may be encouraged to perform this ritual.

Fire is a support of the universe in its macrocosmic aspect, the Virāt. This is situated in the heart cave, meaning, in the intellect of the wise.



लोकादिमग्निं तमुवाच तस्मै
या इष्टका यावतीर्वा यथा वा ।
स चापि तत्प्रत्यवदद्यथोक्त-
मथास्य मृत्युः पुनरेवाह तुष्टः ॥ १५ ॥

*lokādimagniṁ tamuvāca tasmai
yā iṣṭakā yāvatīrvā yathā vā,
sa cāpi tat-pratyavadadyathokta
mathāsya mṛtyuḥ punarevāha tuṣṭaḥ. (15)*

लोकादिम् – the source of the world; अग्निं – fire (sacrifice); तम् – that; उवाच – said; तस्मै – to him (Naciketā); या – what (class of); इष्टकाः – bricks; यावतीः – how many; वा – and; यथा वा – and how (to be placed); सः – he; च – and; अपि – also; तत् – that; प्रत्यवदत् – repeated back; यथोक्तम् – as explained; अथ – so; अस्य – at this; मृत्युः – Yama (Lord Death); पुनः – again; एव – even; आह – said; तुष्टः – being pleased

15. Yama then explained to him that fire-sacrifice, the source of the worlds, what (class of) bricks are required for the altar, how many, and how they are to be placed; and Naciketā repeated back (to the Teacher) all, as explained. Then Yama, being pleased at this, said again...

This can be considered as a stanza repeated by Ṛṣi Kaṭhaka or Śruti Bhagavatī Herself.

Even in this scrappy and skeleton draft of a story, Mother Śruti exhibits a perfection of touch and a delicacy of stroke in her art. She not only labours to throw as much colour as possible in the character of the hero but also pauses, now and then, to brighten up the story with sure touches of emotion to paint true life.

It is a natural instinct with every school master to feel extremely happy towards that student who is smart at grasping the lessons at the very first hearing. This is a compliment to the Master himself and at the same time he feels a satisfaction and fulfilment!

Lord Death had explained to his disciple the ritual in all its details; but since this is jñāna-kāṇḍa the details of this ritual are only mentioned in their broadest outline and hinted at by a mere enumeration of subheadings.

Strictly following the ancient method of teaching, here also Lord Death asks the student to repeat the lesson at the end of the instruction. Naciketā stood the test well and repeated in all details the entire lesson. Lord Death, feeling happy at this, blesses the disciple with another extra boon.



तमब्रवीत्प्रीयमाणो महात्मा
वरं तवेहाद्य ददामि भूयः ।
तवैव नाम्ना भवितायमग्निः
सृङ्गां चेमामनेकरूपां गृहाण ॥ १६ ॥

*tamabravīt-priyamāṇo mahātmā
varam tavehādya dadāmi bhūyaḥ
tavaiva nāmnā bhavitāyamagniḥ
sṛṅkāṁ cemāmanekarūpāṁ grhāṇa. (16)*

तम् – him (Naciketā); अब्रवीत् – said; प्रीयमाणः – being delighted;
महात्मा – the magnanimous; वरं – boon; तव – to you; इह – here,
this; अद्य – now; ददामि – I give, grant; भूयः – additional; तवैव –
after thee; नाम्ना – by name; भविता – shall be; अयम् – this; अग्निः
– fire (sacrifice); सृङ्गां – necklace; च – and; इमाम् – these; अनेक
रूपां – multiformed and variegated; गृहाण – thou take

*16. Being delighted, the magnanimous Lord Death, spoke to him
(Naciketā), "I grant now this additional boon. This fire sacrifice
shall be named after thee; and take thou this multiformed and
variegated necklace."*

Lord Death is offering here to his disciple a medal of appreciation in the form of a jewelled necklace (sṛṅkāṁ). Śrī Śaṅkarācārya in his commentary gives two meanings for the word sṛṅkāṁ – (a) 'garland' and (b) 'action' which shall yield many glorious fruits. May be, as Śrī Śaṅkarācārya says, Lord Death might have initiated his disciple into some more secret methods of fulfilling the desires of mankind through mystic rituals and propitiatory ceremonies. Or may be, Lord Death presented the Brāhmaṇa boy with a chain studded

with precious jewels. Whatever it may be, the purpose of the Śruti is served if we understand that the acute intelligence and the inordinate retentive capacity of the student have brought forth an applause from his own Teacher!

Śaṅkarācārya is compelled to bring out these two meanings separately because later on (in 1.2.3) the same term is used clearly meaning ‘a path’. The same meaning ‘chain’ can also be accommodated in both the mantras – here as ‘ornamented’ and there as ‘golden fetter’.

One should be intellectually a Naciketā if one were to pursue the study of the śāstras and thus plan out one’s own Liberation. We may take the warning and understand that Brahmanvidyā is to be pursued in the sannyaśa āśrama not by illiterate scums of society, who cannot seek and find success in life, even when they have the chances to pursue their education fully!



त्रिणाचिकेतस्त्रिभिरेत्य सन्धिं
त्रिकर्मकृत्तरति जन्ममृत्यू ।
ब्रह्मजज्ञं देवमीड्यं विदित्वा
निचाय्येमां शान्तिमत्यन्तमेति ॥ १७ ॥

*triṇāciketastribhiretya sandhiṁ
trikarmakṛt-tarati janmamṛtyū,
brahmajajñam devamīdyaṁ viditvā
nicāyemāṁ śāntimatyantameti. (17)*

त्रिणाचिकेतः – one who has performed Naciketā's fire, three times; त्रिभिः – with the three; एतय – having attained; सन्धि – union; त्रि – three; कर्मकृत् – (one who has) performed the duties; तरति – crosses; जन्ममृत्यू – birth and death; ब्रह्मजज्ञ – born of Brahma; देवम् – bright (fire); ईड्यं – adorable; विदित्वा – having understood; निचाय्य – realising; इमां – this; शान्तिम् – peace; अत्यन्तम् – everlasting; एति – attains

17. *Whoever performs three times this sacrifice of Naciketā's fire and has been united with the 'three' and has performed the three kinds of duties, overcomes birth and death. When he has understood this adorable bright, omniscient fire, born of Brahman and realised Him, then he obtains everlasting peace.*

This stanza reads today as a strange riddle, and certainly had it not been for Śrī Śaṅkarācārya's commentary, the modern students of the Upaniṣad would have gasped at this stanza. But that need not necessarily mean that even in the days of the Vaidika period these stanzas were equally confusing riddles. At that time students were so well grounded in the Vaidika lore and practices that to them this language was self-explanatory and needed no special commentary. And wherever special commentary was needed, certainly, the great ṛṣis of the Upaniṣads must have given their students long discourses and explanations.

'Threefold Naciketā fire' – (a) It may mean one who has performed thrice the Naciketā sacrifice, or (b) it may mean he who learns, knows and performs the Naciketā fire sacrifice, (c) Since Naciketā fire seems to be a form of agnihotra, 'the three' may mean the usual gārhapatya-fire, āhavanīya-fire and the dakṣiṇa-fire.

United with the ‘three’ – Here again it may mean – (a) one who has the three great influences, namely, the father, the mother and the teacher, that is, he who has these three great forces of blessing and who, through obedience and reverence to them all, has come to claim their blessings; or (b) the ‘three’ may refer to the three sources of knowledge, namely, direct experience (pratyakṣa pramāṇa), inference (anumāna pramāṇa) or words of the wise (āgamas). According to Śaṅkarācārya it may also mean – (c) the Vedas, the Smṛtis and the declarations of wise men (śāstras).

The three duties – The threefold karmas that every Brāhmaṇa householder is expected to perform daily are sacrifices, chanting of Vedas, and giving away gifts in charity.

Those who can afford to act up to all the above instructions shall come to enjoy a comparative peace and rest from the whirl of life and death in the kingdom of Indra.



त्रिणाचिकेतस्त्रयमेतद्विदित्वा
य एवं विद्वाँश्चिनुते नाचिकेतम् ।
स मृत्युपाशान्पुरतः प्रणोद्य
शोकातिगो मोदते स्वर्गलोके ॥ १८ ॥

*triṇāciketastrayametad-viditvā
ya evaṁ vidvāṁścinute nāciketam,
sa mṛtyupāśān-purataḥ praṇodya
śokātigo modate svargaloke. (18)*

त्रिणाचिकेतः – one who has performed Naciketā fire sacrifice thrice; त्रयम् – three; एतत् – these; विदित्वा – having known; यः – who; एवं – thus; विद्वां – the knower; चिनुते – performs; नाचिकेतम् – the Naciketā fire (sacrifice); सः – he; मृत्युपाशान् – the chains of death; पुरतः – before (death); प्रणोद्य – destroying, throwing away; शोकातिगः – free from sorrow; मोदते – rejoices; स्वर्गलोके – in the heaven

18. *He who knows the three Naciketā fires and propitiates Naciketā fire with this knowledge, throws off the chains of death before the fall of the body itself, goes beyond sorrows and rejoices in the heaven.*

Lord Death is here concluding his advice on the Naciketā fire sacrifice with a glorification of the karma and the fruits thereof. He says that those who know fully well the three main sections of the knowledge concerning this agnividya shall go beyond the sorrows and tears of the world and reach a plane of Consciousness wherein he shall live and enjoy eternally. The three factors of Naciketā fire knowledge are constituted in the understanding of what has been already said about – (a) the bricks, (b) their number, and (c) the mode of their use. He who performs this yajña and also meditates for long upon the fire as the very Ātman (Self) of the meditator, shall after death reach the state of the total intellect called the Hiraṇyagarbha or the Brahma-loka.

This is as it ought to be. We have found in the earlier discussions how a synthesis of ritual (karma) and meditation (upāsana), when pursued with sincerity, conveys the ego to the greater joy of the Brahma-loka where, being advised by the

Creator Himself, it gains complete Liberation, Kaivalyahood, at the time of the dissolution. This is called ‘Kramamukti’ (gradual Liberation) in Vedānta. The stanza under discussion is very important, inasmuch as it provides the basis for one of the most important beliefs established in the philosophy of Vedānta regarding the process of gradual Liberation.

The Upaniṣad here insists that one who performs Naciketā fire along with the meditation suggested, goes beyond the shackles of death even while living in one’s mortal coil. Herein ‘death’ means the living death in rotten negativities such as ignorance, desires, hatred and so on. The practitioner of this synthesis of ritual (karma) and meditation (upāsana) realises his Self to be the macrocosm, Virāṭ.



एष तेऽग्निर्नचिकेतः स्वर्ग्यो
यमवृणीथा द्वितीयेन वरेण ।
एतमग्निं तवैव प्रवक्ष्यन्ति जनास-
स्तृतीयं वरं नचिकेतो वृणीष्व ॥ १९ ॥

*eṣa te'gnir-naciketaḥ svargyo
yamavṛṇīthā dvitīyena vareṇa,
etamagniṁ tavaiva pravakṣyanti janāsa-
stṛtīyaṁ varam naciketo vṛṇīṣva. (19)*

एषः – this; ते – they; अग्निः – the fire (sacrifice); नचिकेतः – O Naciketā; स्वर्ग्यः – that leads to heaven; यम – which; अवृणीथाः – you have chosen; द्वितीयेन – by the second; वरेण – boon; एतम् – this; अग्निं – fire (sacrifice); तवैव – thine alone; प्रवक्ष्यन्ति – will

call; जनासः – people; तृतीयं – the third; वरं – boon; नचिकेतः – O Naciketā; वृणीष्व – you choose

19. *This is thy fire, O Naciketā! which leads to heaven, and which you craved for. By the second boon people will call this fire after thine name alone. O Naciketā! Now you choose thy third boon.*

Extremely pleased at the disciple's intelligence, sincerity and devotion, Lord Death is heaping upon him blessing after blessing. Dharmarāja declares that the details of this ritual given out for men of the world through the boy shall be eternally called after Naciketā.

Again, in this stanza, Mother Śruti has cleverly concealed a beautiful artistic stroke which throws a flood of light upon the magnanimity and truthfulness of Lord Death. Though Lord Death was pleased to shower upon the disciple extra boons, he yet feels obliged and indebted to the Brāhmaṇa boy, and since he had not given the promised 'third' boon. It was possible that Naciketā himself might have forgotten the first promise made by Lord Death, 'Ask of me three boons.' But Lord Death the magnanimous, the Master of righteousness, Himself reminds the Brāhmaṇa boy of the third boon, 'Choose now, O Naciketā! thy third boon.'



येयं प्रेते विचिकित्सा मनुष्ये-
ऽस्तीत्येके नायमस्तीति चैके ।
एतद्विद्यामनुशिष्टस्त्वयाहं
वराणामेषः वरस्तृतीयः ॥ २० ॥

*yeyam prete vicikitsā manuṣye-
'stītyeke nāyamastīti caike,
etad-vidyāmanuśiṣṭastvayāham
varāṇāmeṣaḥ varastṛtiyaḥ. (20)*

या – that; इयं – this (doubt); प्रेते – when dead; विचिकित्सा – doubt;
मनुष्ये – in man; अस्ति – does exist; इति – thus; एके – some; अयम्
– this; न अस्ति – does not exist; इति – thus; च – and; एके – some;
एतत् – this; विद्याम् – shall like to know; अनुशिष्टः – being taught;
त्वया – by you; अहं – I; वराणाम् – among the boons; एषः – this;
वरः – boon; तृतीयः – the third

*20. There is that doubt. When a man is dead, some say, 'He exists'
and some again say, 'He does not'. This I would like to know,
taught by thee. This is the third boon, that I ask.*

Not even a Shakespearian genius could have so deftly delineated the character of the hero with mere suggestions made with unsaid words as the ṛṣis of the Upaniṣads. Our salutations to the immortal ṛṣis.

We have found earlier how the ideal spiritual aspirant in Naciketā liquidated the first of his boons in ensuring the peace and joy of his father and how he dedicated the second boon to bless the community of man! Now, only when cashing in the last of his boons does he think of his own kalyāṇa (Liberation) and presents one of his great doubts for clarification.

This spirit of sacrifice and capacity to find within oneself enough sympathy to serve not only one's own near

and dear relatives but also the whole universe and thus put their kalyāṇa first, even before one's own redemption, is one of the most important qualifications unavoidable in a true seeker, if he is to be a total success in his pilgrimage to Truth. This is certainly against the belief that has now come to be rampant among the devotee class. In this misunderstanding is an entire hornet's nest of sorrows suffered by the devotees.

Religious pursuit will not and cannot be a bar to perfect social and communal living. A spiritual aspirant is not to be dumb and deaf; he must be one fully aware of needs and sorrows of the world of men around him and must seek and find within himself a kindness and love enough to make his heart weeping for the sorrows of others. If he has not the capacity to identify himself with his own relations and his own generation, he is not fit to enter the holy of holies in the temple of Truth.

With this stanza, the Upaniṣad proper starts. So far the effort was in building up a dramatic situation wherein a matured soul is brought into the presence of a full-fledged Teacher.

The doubt now raised by the young Brāhmaṇa boy shows his own scriptural knowledge and self-evolution. Rarely has the animal man, ever running after sensuous pleasures, the mental poise and the intellectual stamina to ponder over life as a whole and come to entertain such a deep and pointed doubt.

Many are the thinkers who have been tantalised by the horrid beauty of this tearful incident in life called death.

Even today death is a fascinating idea with all writers and thinkers, authors and philosophers of all climes and conditions. But often we find that men of the required calibre rarely come to solve this serious problem. It is only the ṛṣis of old, who, in their quietude, had prepared their instruments of understanding and feeling to the required efficiency to soar into the sublime realms of the beyond, that have really succeeded in observing coolly, in analysing scientifically and in concluding truly the what, how and why of the phenomenon called death.

Even among the thinkers of India, we do meet with opposing conclusions and self-contradictory arguments regarding this common but strange happening, death. As Naciketā says in the stanza, there are some schools of thinkers who have established that death is the end of all and there is nothing but a zero beyond it. There are yet others who accept, argue and establish that there is existence even beyond the grave.

This question whether there is existence after death or not is not one which belongs to the realm of the mind and the intellect. These instruments of feeling and knowing do, at their best, give us only some vague directions pointing towards a world of knowledge that actually lies spread out beyond their own frontiers! In order to travel towards that land of pure Knowledge the ordinary mortal, however intellectual and sensitive he may be, has not the necessary vehicle. It is only the great Masters of renunciation and wisdom who have specially developed their intuitive faculty that can at will take one into these realms beyond.

In short, such transcendental questions cannot be explained by words and established through any of the ordinarily known 'proofs of knowledge' such as direct-perception, inference, comparison and so on. The only way to solve them is through the āgamas which are the words of wisdom given out by Men of Realisation, the saints and sages.

Hence, the justification for Naciketā to put this question to Lord Death, the king of all dharmas (Dharmarāja).

It is the nihilists of the Buddhist order and materialists (Cārvakas) of the Hindu fold that mainly come to the conclusion that the end is a 'Nothing'.

To the materialist, this body is all that is and life is a manifestation that is incidental to the occasion when the limbs and the sense organs are assembled together to form a body; to them the warmth of pulsating life is not a divine Power presiding over the destinies of the body, but it is a by-product, just as when betel leaves, lime and nut are chewed together, a third entity the 'red colour' becomes the by-product which, in fact, is not a quality in anyone of the three things when chewed separately. Similarly, they claim, when the parts of the body are all assembled together by prakṛti, Life manifests!!

And to such a team of believers, death is disappearance of the body; and so of the life, into a zero – 'Out of zero the life comes, plays out its uncertain games for a time, and into zero back again it disappears.'

This philosophy is but a hollow drumbeat to any thinking individual; for, out of nothing a thing cannot come nor can a thing disappear indeed, to become nothing.

On examining closely the arguments of the nihilists, we can very easily find their self-contradicting stand. They argue to establish that the ultimate Truth is non-existence. According to them, non-existence existed, which is certainly a statement of self-contradiction. Śaṅkarācārya takes up the same argument to thrash the nihilists out of the field of serious consideration. If we are to accept the entire argument raised by the nihilists, we have to conclude that they have positively known the non-existence state, that is they have a positive knowledge of this negative state called non-existence. To Śaṅkara and the Vedāntins, the Knower or the knowledge that knows the non-Existence is the supreme Truth, and ‘the Knower in us knows no decay, disease or death’, says the Śruti.

Thus, mere book knowledge can only confuse a seeker since there are different conclusions arrived at by different thinkers, each arguing and thinking independently according to his own temperament and culture! The only Daniel that can give us a true judgement is the Master who has subjective experience of Truth. Naciketā is, therefore, fully justified in asking of Lord Death this question pertaining to adhyātma.



देवैरत्रापि विचिकित्सितं पुरा
न हि सुविज्ञेयमणुरेष धर्मः ।
अन्यं वरं नचिकेतो वृणीष्व
मा मोपरोत्सीरति मा सृजैनम् ॥ २१ ॥

*devairatrāpi vicikitsitaṁ purā
na hi suvijñeyamaṇureṣa dharmah
anyaṁ varaṁ naciketo vṛṇīṣva
mā moparotsīrati mā sṛjainam. (21)*

देवैः – by the gods; अत्र – on this (point); अपि – even; विचिकित्सितं – have doubted; पुरा – in olden times; न हि – verily it is not; सुविज्ञेयम् – easy to understand; अणुः – subtle; एषः – this; धर्मः – principle, subject; अन्यं – another; वरं – boon; नचिकेतः – O Naciketā; वृणीष्व – choose; मा – do not; मोपरोत्सीः – press me; मा – me; अति सृज – give up, release; एनम् – this

21. On this point even the gods have doubted in olden times. Verily the subject is very subtle, it is not easy to understand. O Naciketā! Choose another boon; do not press me on this, give this up for me.

Here onwards, we shall find a series of stanzas in which Lord Death is testing his disciple. There are hundreds of people who, though immature, might stumble themselves upon a doubt or two on themes transcendental. All such people are not generally sufficiently ripe in intellect or pure in mind to grasp the subtle Truth as discussed in the śāstras. To give out the absolute standpoint and to discuss with them directly the divine nature of the immortal soul is wasteful effort which shall not produce any effect upon the hearers.

Great Masters, therefore, always test their disciples and only when the disciples are found to be fit for the great initiation do they deliver the goods as such!

This does not mean that the principles of Vedānta are to be kept as close secrets and are to be given out only to a select few. Vedānta knowledge is the birthright of man; it belongs to all, at all times.

This kind of wise discrimination is actually being practised in our everyday life, by almost all of us. For example, if an infant child were to enquire of his father, ‘Dad, how does it rain?’ The Dad, if he be intelligent, would tell the child of the ‘white elephant’ that stands always behind the dark clouds and sprinkles the water contents of its trunk on the people. While the same father would answer the same question to the same boy after some ten years, explaining to him the vapour contents of the clouds and the principle of condensation when the clouds reach the cooler forest areas. These two different explanations of same phenomenon are given out to the same child at different stages of his growth, since the later explanation will not and cannot appeal at the earlier stage!

It is only in this sense that the Teacher tests the student’s maturity and then gives out his discourses according to the standard category to which the particular disciple belongs.

Lord Death is here trying to examine Naciketā, the seeker. He, in an assumed air of sincerity, says to the Brāhmaṇa boy that He dare not waste the blessing of one of his boons in explaining a futile enquiry of the boy – ‘What

happens to the soul after death?’ The topic is so subtle and difficult to understand that ‘even gods of old have to this day their own doubts’ adds the Lord.

‘Deva’ means effulgent – meaning those divine ones who live in the heavens and have in their make-up an ampler potency of intellect and mind. The gods have a greater capacity to feel and to reason out, and also they have a longer period of existence to enquire, analyse and understand such themes. ‘Even they’ says Lord Death, ‘have not yet come to a final understanding of the nature of the soul.’ Naturally, it is self-evident that the topic is futile for a mere mortal child to hope even to understand the great theme.

Indeed, Lord Death has very efficiently argued in this stanza against Naciketā’s insistence for an answer to his question. We must always remember that Lord Death had no intentions of evading the question. Probably, more than the disciple, the Guru was anxious to give Knowledge. But unless the recipient has the required receptivity, it is not only futile but at times even dangerous to give out the sacred truths of Vedānta to such an unprepared candidate. For the lesser intellects are apt to misunderstand the real import and purpose of the Śruti declarations. Vedānta when rightly understood, can make a pure devotee a God upon earth; but it shall make the student a devil if he is not properly conditioned to receive the knowledge in its right bearing and significance.

A match box, a blessing in the hands of a grown-up may be a danger in the hands of a child!



देवैरत्रापि विचिकित्सितं किल
त्वं च मृत्यो यन्न सुविज्ञेयमात्थ ।
वक्ता चास्य त्वादृगन्यो न लभ्यो
नान्यो वरस्तुल्य एतस्य कश्चित् ॥ २२ ॥

*devairatrāpi vicikitsitam kila
tvam ca mrtyo yanna suvijñeyamātha,
vaktā cāsya tvāḍṛganyo na labhyo
nānyo varastulya etasya kaścit. (22)*

देवैः – by the gods; अत्र – here; अपि – even; विचिकित्सितं – have doubted; किल – indeed; त्वं च – you also; मृत्यो – O Death; यत् – which; न – not; सुविज्ञेयम् – easy to understand; आत्थ – sayest; वक्ता – one who tells (Teacher); च – also; अस्य – to this; त्वादृक् – like you; अन्यः – other; न लभ्यः – cannot be found; नान्यः – no other; वरः – boon; तुल्यः – equal; एतस्य – of this; कश्चित् – any

22. Thou sayest, O Death! that even the gods have doubts here and that this is not so easy to know. None other (Teacher) like thee who can tell of this can be found; no other boon can, at all, equal this.

If Lord Death's tempting words in the last stanza were a masterpiece in their suggestiveness for psychoanalysis, the unrelenting words of firm resolve to know and to understand, as expressed by the student here, are equally a great masterpiece. According to the student, there are no boons which can be equal to an answer to this great question of the beyond, since the fruits gained from all the boons are finite and perishable, as they are all mere material gains. Again, if even the gods could not, of their own accord,

seek and successfully reach a final understanding of the nature of the Ātman, it is but in the fitness of things that we, the men of the world, need a great Master to give us this knowledge. And we can have no greater Master than Lord Death himself!



शतायुषः पुत्रपौत्रान्वृणीष्व
बहून्पशून्हस्तिहिरण्यमश्वान् ।
भूमेर्महदायतनं वृणीष्व
स्वयं च जीव शरदो यावदिच्छसि ॥२३॥

*śatāyusaḥ putra-pautrān-vṛṇīṣva
bahūn-paśūn-hasti-hiraṇyam-aśvān,
bhūmer-mahadāyatanaṁ vṛṇīṣva
svayaṁ ca jīva śarado yāvadicchasi. (23)*

शतायुषः – who may live hundred years; पुत्रपौत्रान् – sons and grandsons; वृणीष्व – you ask for; बहून् – many; पशून् – cattle; हस्ति – elephants; हिरण्यम् – gold; अश्वान् – horses; भूमेः – in the world; महत् – vast, great; आयतनं – territory (kingdom); वृणीष्व – you choose; स्वयं च – and yourself; जीव – live; शरदः – years (autumns); यावत् – as many; इच्छसि – you like

23. Choose sons and grandsons who may live a hundred years, herds of cattle, elephants, gold and horses. Choose a vast territory on earth, live yourself as many autumns (years) as you like.

Lord Death is now continuing his endless charms to test the calibre of the student. Unless a seeker has come to feel a

complete detachment from the delusory charms of the sense objects, there is no hope for him to get attached to the real and the permanent world of Truth. Hence the justice in such severe trials is meted out by the Masters to their beloved students. These examinations are held in our Vaidika system not in the present-day spirit of breaking the student but were conducted with a view to making the student. If, in case, a student unfortunately falls below the standards of Vaidika expectation, he is not condemned as hopeless forever, but the Teacher's instructions would be to purify and ennoble the student; and thereby lift him up to the highest standards of efficiency.

The list of offered temptations seems to be an exhaustive one and no ordinary mortal can easily stand against its killing tentacles! Lord Death has offered Naciketā many sons and grandsons, all centenarians too. Moreover, his list contains material wealth, kingdoms and power. All these would have been useless if the recipient of these blessings had not himself a sufficient span of life to live. Wealth would be indeed a tragedy to a man who dies young. But Naciketā is here offered as many years of life as he would like to live and enjoy.



एतत्तुल्यं यदि मन्यसे वरं
वृणीष्व वित्तं चिरजीविकां च ।
महाभूमौ नचिकेतस्त्वमेधि
कामानां त्वा कामभाजं करोमि ॥ २४ ॥

*etattulyam yadi manyase varam
vr̥ṇīṣva vittam cirajīvikām ca,
mahābhūmau naciketastvamedhi
kāmanām tvā kāmabhājam karomi. (24)*

एतत् – this; तुल्यं – equal to; यदि – if; मन्यसे – consider; वरं – boon; वृणीष्व – you choose; वित्तं – wealth; चिरजीविकां – long life; च – and; महाभूमौ – wide earth (large, vast kingdom); नचिकेतः – O Naciketā; त्वम् – you; एधिः – become (be a king); कामानां – of all desires; त्वा – you; कामभाजं – the enjoyer; करोमि – I shall make

24. Ask for some other boon equal to this, if thou thinkest fit, (such as) wealth and longevity; be king of the wide earth, O Naciketā! I shall make thee, the enjoyer of all thy desires.

Here is a supplementary list which Lord Death appends to his previous offerings as already contained in the last stanza.

Probably at the end of the previous stanza, Lord Death vainly watches for some glow of satisfaction in the face of the pure devotee, Naciketā.

Friends, anyone of you, at the mere hope of a fair chance of getting some five rupees somewhere in another part of this city, would certainly now run away from this yajñāśālā; but here is a seeker who has been offered not only a hundred percent sure boon giving him not only children, grandchildren, gold, cattle and kingdom but also an inordinately long span of life, and yet, the true seeker in Naciketā, not even brightens up a little. A similar single pointedness of purpose and a ready willingness to sacrifice

everything at the altar of Truth is the true spirit found in all successful seekers.

In this stanza, Lord Death is completing the list of things offered to see if the boy can be tempted away from his main pursuit. 'May be, Naciketā has some secret desires of his own which have not yet been covered by my long list. This may be probably the cause of the disinterestedness that is evidently written large in the boy's face.' Thinking thus Lord Death invites Naciketā to ask for any boon of anything that he might cherish a desire for, besides ample wealth and long life.

Even after this, Lord Death fails to see in the boy's face any enthusiasm, and so, he offers Naciketā the lordship over the whole world and promises to make him an enjoyer of his all possible desires.

All these boons to be exchanged for a simple request to drop the main question, 'Is there an existence after death?' What a bargain! And yet what a sad failure for Lord Death!!



ये ये कामा दुर्लभा मर्त्यलोके
सर्वान्कामाश्छन्दतः प्रार्थयस्व ।
इमा रामाः सरथाः सतूर्या
न हीदृशा लभ्यनीया मनुष्यैः
आभिर्मत्प्रप्ताभिः परिचारयस्व
नचिकेतो मरणं मानुप्राक्षीः ॥ २५ ॥

*ye ye kāmā durlabhā martyaloke
sarvān kāmāṁśchandataḥ prārthayasva,
imā rāmāḥ sarathāḥ satūryā
na hīdṛśā lambhyanīyā manuṣyaiḥ,
ābhir-matprattābhiḥ paricārayasva
naciketo maraṇam mānuprākṣiḥ. (25)*

ये ये – whatever; कामाः – objects of desire; दुर्लभाः – difficult to attain; मर्त्यलोके – in the world of mortals; सर्वान् – all; कामां – objects of desire; छन्दतः – according to thy choice; प्रार्थयस्व – ask for; इमाः – these; रामाः – fair maidens; सरथाः – with chariots; सतूर्याः – with musical instruments; न हि – not indeed; ईदृशाः – such (maidens); लम्ब्यनीयाः – enjoyable, obtainable; मनुष्यैः – by mortals; आभिः – with them (maidens); मत्प्रत्ताभिः – given by me; परिचारयस्व – be attended on; नचिकेतः – O Naciketā; मरणं – (about) Death; मा – do not; अनुप्राक्षीः – question about

25. Whatever desires are difficult to attain in this world of mortals, ask for them all according to thy wish. These fair maidens with their chariots and musical instruments – such indeed are not enjoyable by mortals – thou be attended by them, I will give them to thee; but O Naciketā! do not question about the state of the soul after death.

Even a single, unsuspected and unconscious desire-worm, lurking anywhere in the subconscious, ruins the entire psychological make-up of a seeker! A true sādḥaka who is marked out for success is he who has come to enjoy a balanced development of his physical, psychological and spiritual personalities. If anyone of them is distorted, then

the entire combination becomes ill-adjusted, and from such a maladjusted instrument no true music can emerge! As a true doctor of the soul, Lord Death requests Naciketā not to insist upon knowing the state of existence after death but to wish for any material gain or sensuous happiness which may be waiting in him for fulfilment. The student is offered the services of heavenly damsels, divinely beautiful and godly graceful chariots, horses, ornaments... what not!



श्रोभावा मर्त्यस्य यदन्तकैत-
त्सर्वेन्द्रियाणां जरयन्ति तेजः ।
अपि सर्वं जीवितमल्पमेव
तवैव वाहास्तव नृत्यगीते ॥ २६ ॥

*śvobhāvā martyasya yad-antakaita-
tsarvendriyāṇāṃ jarayanti tejah,
api sarvaṃ jīvitam-alpam-eva
tavaiva vāhāstava nṛtyagīte. (26)*

श्रोभावाः – ephemeral; मर्त्यस्य – of the mortal man; यत् – whatever there is; अन्तक – O Death; एतत् – this; सर्वेन्द्रियाणां – of all the senses; जरयन्ति – wear out; तेजः – vigour; अपि – also; सर्वं – all; जीवितम् – life; अल्पम् – is short; एव – indeed; तवैव – thine alone (may remain) वाहाः – horses; तव – thy; नृत्यगीते – dance and song

26. Ephemeral these, O Death! these tend to decay the fire (vigour) of all the senses in man. Even the longest life is indeed short. Let thine alone be the chariots, the dance and the music.

The patient has reacted well to the suggestions of Lord Death who erstwhile acted as a psychiatrist. This is evident from the tone and the word of Naciketā's answer. Moreover, the very argument hinted at by Naciketā, based upon which he has come to the same conclusion that the finite sense objects have no eternal value clearly shows that Naciketā, though a boy, has lived a fruitful life of intelligent self-analysis and critical discrimination of men and things.

He characterises truly all objects of the senses as finite and ephemeral and hence his disgust for them. During his short life in the world, he has been living intensely, and in his discrimination, he has come to the wise conclusion that material objects, even if they be heavenly, are but delusory things and so will not last long, 'even till tomorrow' – śvaḥ-abhāvaḥ – which are uncertain in their existence even till tomorrow (śvaḥ – tomorrow + abhāvaḥ – absence).

Again, not only the sense objects are in themselves finite, but to meddle with them is to weaken the very instrument of our appreciation and enjoyment. Without the sense organs the sense objects cannot influence our minds and produce therein any experience either of joy or sorrow. When the light of Naciketā's discrimination comes to play fully upon them, it becomes clear that the disastrous sense objects, themselves perishable, would also hasten the deterioration of the sense organs. The first laḍḍū¹ may be sweet, but the fifth one may not be so sweet; the twentieth laḍḍū may be full of pain, and the forty-second one would be cruelty manifest! Such being the case, no thinking individual (who has the

¹ an Indian sweet-meat

courage of intellectual conviction to pursue only the path shown by his intellect) will run after the material pleasures born of ephemeral objects, however glorious they may look for the time being.

As to the offer made by Lord Death regarding the long span of life, Naciketā has but a smile of understanding disgust for it. To Naciketā life in this embodiment, however long, is but fleeting; for, can a human mind ever come to feel any sense of complete satisfaction however long he may succeed in living here on this globe? Whatever be the span of life allotted, there is after all, a death lurking at the end of it all. And death is equally painful whether it be today or a thousand years afterwards!

And hence, at the peak of his disgust, born out of a right understanding, Naciketā cries, 'Keep thou thy chariots, the dance and the music.' One must be a true Guru himself to realise the ocean of joy Lord Death must have felt at this seemingly outrageous explosion of the young boy! This declaration in its very vehemence unveils the brilliant inner personality of this matured soul, Naciketā. To a Naciketā-like student, Self-realisation is immediate and sure.



न वित्तेन तर्पणीयो मनुष्यो
लप्स्यामहे वित्तमद्राक्ष्म चेत्त्वा ।
जीविष्यामो यावदीशिष्यसि त्वं
वरस्तु मे वरणीयः स एव ॥ २७ ॥

*na vittena tarpaṇīyo manuṣyo
lapsyāmahe vittamadrākṣma cettvā,
jīviṣyāmo yāvadiśiṣyasi tvaṁ
varastu me varaṇīyaḥ sa eva. (27)*

न – not; वित्तेन – with wealth; तर्पणीयः – satisfied; मनुष्यः – man;
लप्स्यामहे – we will get; वित्तम् – wealth; अद्राक्ष्म – have seen; चेत्
– if; त्वा – thee; जीविष्यामः – we shall live; यावत् – so long; इशिष्यसि
– you rule; त्वं – you; वरः – boon; तु – but; मे – to me; वरणीयः – to
be craved for; सः – that; एव – alone

*27. Man is not to be satisfied with wealth. Now that we have seen
thee, we shall surely get wealth. We shall also live, as long as you
rule. Therefore, that boon alone is not worth to be craved for by me.*

Naciketā, though a child, has the wisdom of a sire. He has not been living life as a dumb driven cattle. He has lived intelligently and has been ever fully aware of all his own experiences and many of the experiences of others. Thus he has come to the sane conclusion that mere wealth cannot and will not provide the possessor with a free passport to happiness. Here wealth means not only bank balance, debentures and shares. The word is used here in its broadest scope to embrace every detail and item in all the possible circumstances in life.

It is an obvious truth that by arranging the external world in which we are living, we cannot guarantee our happiness. Happiness is a state of the mind arrived at by itself during its transactions with the external set-ups functioning in time, place and condition. The objects remaining the same, the same mind can react differently upon them according to

its condition at the time of the reaction. Thus, pudding which is always sweet, may taste unsatisfactorily bitter when the mind that plays behind the tongue is embittered by some immediate sorrow or pain. It is, in fact, only a statement of truth when Naciketā says that no man can be made happy by only wealth. This is obvious and yet rarely recognised in life. We too often meet sad rich men, and even millionaires are often known to have committed suicide.

‘Again’ argues Naciketā, ‘having gained all the wealth a man can enjoy, they are available only till such time as he has not met with Lord Death.’ A dead man shall need no more, not even a penny out of his rich coffers!

This very same portion in the stanza can also be interpreted to mean that having met thee, O Lord Death! who can go back poor? Here, it means that a mere ‘darśana’ of the Lord Death is sufficient to bless the devotee with all material gains and as such, Naciketā means to say that it would be unwise to spend out this third boon for the blessing of a thing which he has already come to enjoy.

That is, it is indeed a criminal waste, almost amounting to madness, if a schoolmaster labours to gain an interview with the Education Minister only to request him for an appointment as a schoolmaster!!

Based upon the above argument Naciketā, the wise and discriminating seeker, firmly informs his Teacher that the boon he had asked for is all that he demands of the Master.



अजीर्यताममृतानामुपेत्य
जीर्यन्मर्त्यः क्वधःस्थः प्रजानन् ।
अभिध्यायन्वर्णरतिप्रमोदा-
नतिदीर्घे जीविते को रमेत ॥ २८ ॥

*ajīryatāmamṛtānāmupetya
jīryan-martyaḥ kvadhaḥ-sthaḥ prajānan,
abhidhyāyan-varṇaratipramodā
natidīrghe jīvite ko rameta. (28)*

अजीर्यताम् – the undecaying; अमृतानाम् – the immortal ones; उपेत्य – having approached; जीर्यन् – being perishable; मर्त्यः – the mortal; क्वधःस्थः – existing on the earth down below; प्रजानन् – well knowing; अभिध्यायन् – having scrutinised; वर्णः – beauty; रतिः – love; प्रमोदान् – the enjoyments of; अतिदीर्घे – in the long; जीविते – life; कः – who; रमेत – will rejoice

28. What decaying mortals living in the world below and possessed of knowledge, after having approached the company of the undecaying and the immortal, will rejoice in the long life, after he has pondered over the nature of the pleasure produced by song and sport (beauty and love)?

This stanza is not a pessimistic cry of despair that has risen up from a rotten mind and intellect steeped in sensuousness and ignorance, but is glorious song of optimism and knowledge born out of a healthy mind and a developed intellect basking in the glory of cloudless wisdom! In its very core, the words contain a burning satire at the human worms that gloat and revel in the leprous ditch of fleshy enjoyments, and thus waste their precious heritage of true living as a God upon earth.

Naciketā, while condemning the agonising existence of the men of the world struggling to earn, striving to possess, labouring to hoard and hurrying to spend, has at once the sympathetic understanding to find an excuse also for the suicidal mischief of mankind against itself. He says that, 'Having approached the company of the undecaying and the immortal' none will come to entertain any attachment or fascination for the destructible and the dying.

Though all religions unanimously claim that man must learn to detach himself from this body-mind-intellect combination and its relationships, yet it is very rarely understood by the generality of people that this act of detachment can be a success only to a degree equal to the degree of attachment a seeker develops towards the inner Truth Principle which guides and vitalises not only the inner equipment as the 'Knower' but also the outer world consciously cognised as the 'known'. It is with this philosophical Truth in mind that Naciketā makes his statement, 'None can rejoice in the long life' with a conditional clause, 'when once he has approached the undecaying and the immortal'.

To attach ourselves to the Divine is to detach ourselves from the undivine. To walk into light is to walk out of darkness. To swim on to the shore is to move out of water. To wake up is to escape the dream. Thus, all true religions can be called either as the religion of attachment or as the religion of detachment, according to the emphasis that has been laid by the Master in the Bible!!



यस्मिन्निदं विचिकित्सन्ति मृत्यो
यत्साम्पराये महति ब्रूहि नस्तत् ।
योऽयं वरो गूढमनुप्रविष्टो
नान्यं तस्मान्नचिकेता वृणीते ॥ २९ ॥

इति काठकोपनिषदि प्रथमाध्याये प्रथमा वल्ली समाप्ता ॥

*yasminn-idam vicikitsanti mṛtyo
yat-sāmparāye mahati brūhi nas-tat,
yo'yaṁ varo gūḍham-anupraviṣṭo
nānyaṁ tasmān-naciketā vṛṇīte. (29)*

iti kāṭhakopaniṣadi prathamādhyaṇī prathamā vallī samāptā.

यस्मिन् – in which; इदं – this; विचिकित्सन्ति – men doubt; मृत्यो – O Death; यत् – which; साम्पराये – passing beyond; महति – great; ब्रूहि – tell; नः – us; तत् – that; यः – which; अयं – this; वरः – boon; गूढमनुप्रविष्टः – become mysterious; नान्यं – no other; तस्मात् – therefore; नचिकेता – Naciketā; वृणीते – chooses

29. O Death! Tell us that in which men have this doubt and which is about the great passing beyond (i.e. supreme life after death). Naciketā does not choose any other boon but that (concerning the soul) of which the knowledge is hidden (mysterious).

(Thus ends the first vallī of the first chapter)

The first section of the first chapter is rounded off with a firm and determined demand of the disciple. No temptation was big enough to entice the aspirations of Naciketā away into the deluding charms of the brittle sense objects and their glittering joys.

This vallī (section) not only gives a dramatic setting for the whole Upaniṣad but also, at the same time, leaves upon the minds of the readers an unforgettable picture of the adorable spirit and the burning thirst in the young Brāhmaṇa boy. He has not only a discriminating intellect but also a godly share of the spirit of detachment from the false and saintly attachment with the Real.

In this first section we have very little of the Upaniṣad proper; the philosophical disquisitions start only from the second section onwards. Herein so far, it was the labour of Śruti Bhagavatī to emphasise sādhana catuṣṭaya – the special qualifications – demanded of a perfect student of Vedānta in his coming to experience intuitively the Truth Absolute as his own Self.

These qualifications are –

- (1) viveka – is the capacity to discriminate between the Real and the unreal, that is, firm conviction of the intellect that Brahman alone is Real and phenomenal world is unreal.
- (2) vairāgya – is the spirit of detachment from the enjoyment of fruits of action here and hereafter;
- (3) ṣaṭ sampatti –

The six ethical perfections are –

- (i) śama – is the peaceful state of the mind when it rests constantly upon contemplation, freed repeatedly from the agitations created by its continuous desire for sense objects.

- (ii) dama – is the self-control by steering sense organs (both of knowledge and actions) away from their sense objects and placing them in their respective centres of activities that is absorption of rays of perception within their respective sense organs.
- (iii) uparati – is the self-withdrawal, in other words, that condition of thought waves in which they are free from the influence of external objects.
- (iv) titikṣā – is the capacity of the mind to cheerfully endure all sorrows and sufferings like heat and cold, pleasures and pain and so on, without grudging, without struggling for redress and without feeling helpless or lamenting.
- (v) śraddhā – is the healthy attempt at a clear intellectual appreciation of the exact import of the pregnant words of the scriptures as well as advice of the preceptor (Guru, that is, a Teacher).
- (vi) samādhāna – is the state of poise and tranquillity, that is, the single pointedness of the mind gained as a result of constant contemplation on the Supreme and the Divine.

and

- (4) mumukṣutva – is the impatient and a burning desire for Liberation that is to realise the Self within, which is the Self in all.





SECTION 2 – द्वितीया वल्ली

Lord Death's teaching on immortality... the comprehension and apprehension of the eternal Reality –

अन्यच्छ्रेयोऽन्यदुतैव प्रेय-
स्ते उभे नानार्थे पुरुषं सिनीतः ।
तयोः श्रेय आददानस्य साधु
भवति हीयतेऽर्थाद्य उ प्रेयो वृणीते ॥ १ ॥

anyacchreyo'nyadutaiva preya-
ste ubhe nānārthe puruṣaṁ-sinītaḥ,
tayoḥ śreya ādadānasya sādhu
bhavati hīyate'rthādyā u preyo vṛṇīte. (1)

अन्यत् – one; श्रेयः – the good; अन्यत् – another; उत – and; एव – indeed; प्रेयः – pleasant; ते – these; उभे – two; नाना – different; अर्थे – objects; पुरुषं – man; सिनीतः – chains, binds; तयोः – of these two; श्रेयः – the good; आददानस्य – who chooses; साधु – good (blessed); भवति – becomes; हीयते – get deviated, falls away; अर्थात् – from the true end (goal); यः – he who; उ – and; प्रेयः – the pleasant; वृणीते – chooses

1. Yama said, "One is good, while another indeed is pleasant. These two, having different objects, chain (bind) a man. Blessed is he who, between these two, chooses the good alone, but he who chooses what is pleasant, loses the true end (goal)."

Having thus tested the disciple and found him worthy of the great Knowledge, Lord Death said, 'Good is one thing and pleasant is another.' Every action of all the living beings is motivated by an irresistible instinct to be happy. Happiness seems to be the goal of every struggle and strife in life. Even a worm crawling in faecal matter wanders about motivated by a hope that it would reach a point where a greater joy than it is enjoying at the moment would be its lot! In full and absolute contentment all desires and hopes end, and this supreme state of desirelessness or hopelessness is the goal of life. This is called godhood, or the state of Kaivalya. If thus to act is our lot and we cannot remain without striving for this state of total contentment, it is time that we analyse our experiences and decide for ourselves what the true way of striving is.

It is a consideration upon this problem that has brought out this learned stanza from Lord Death himself.

Dharmarāja classifies all actions, with reference to their fruits, into two divisions. The fruits of actions can be of two kinds – those contributing to the prosperity in life and those leading to the immortality in the beyond. That is to say, our efforts can be such as contributing an immediate passing material gain or such as shall contribute in the long run to our self-culturing and self-purification.

A heartless black marketeer or a characterless corrupt officer, through foul and fiendish methods, revelling in greed and lust, can win in the 'money hoarding race'. And to the ignorant and the sensuous this may appear to be an inviting prospect and a welcoming success too!

We, as individuals, are also free to build our lives upon the more enduring principle of living, such as honesty, piety, truthfulness, mercy, love, tolerance and so on, and live for the greater wealth of self-culturing and the consequent inner peace and joy.

It is these two paths of choice freely open for each individual that have been hinted at here, by Lord Death when he says, 'One is good while another is pleasant.' That which is 'good' need not necessarily be always pleasant, although there are pursuits which are 'good' and are at once 'pleasant' also.

That spiritual hero, who consistently sticks to the path of good, unmindful of the unpleasantness and material privations, and who has to suffer in course of his higher pursuits, is the one who reaches the true end, the state of enduring joy.

The statement, 'Both these chain a man' is very significant from the highest standpoint of the supreme goal. The path of the pleasant abducts the pursuer often into the dangerous jungles of crimes and sins, thereby insuring him a long lease of painful existence as a conscious being born in the lower wombs (yonīs). That is, by the pursuit of the pleasant, we are pulling ourselves down and scheming to remain in the lower scales of evolution; sins and criminalities are blockades over which we tumble to fall back into the lower rungs on the ladder of evolution.

Similarly, too, a conscious following of the path of the good, with a desire to enjoy the fruits thereof, would be

demanding for ourselves a transfer into the softer planes of Consciousness, the worlds of the gods, wherein such people will have to take embodiments to live through the fruits of their meritorious acts. To the perfect seeker of the Absolute, therefore, both the path of the pleasant and the path of the good, are bondages indeed!!



श्रेयश्च प्रेयश्च मनुष्यमेत-
स्तौ सम्परीत्य विविनक्ति धीरः ।
श्रेयो हि धीरोऽभि प्रेयसो वृणीते
प्रेयो मन्दो योगक्षेमाद्वृणीते ॥ २ ॥

*śreyaśca preyaśca manuṣyameta-
stau samparītya vivinakti dhīraḥ,
śreyo hi dhīro'bhi preyaśo vṛṇīte
preyo mando yogakṣemādvṛṇīte. (2)*

श्रेयः – the good; च – and; प्रेयः – the pleasant; च – also; मनुष्यम् – the man; एतः – approach; तौ – those (two); सम्परीत्य – having examined from all sides; विविनक्ति – discriminates; धीरः – the wise man; श्रेयः हि – the good only; धीरः – the wise man; प्रेयसः – to the pleasant; अभिवृणीते – prefers; प्रेयः – the pleasant; मन्दः – the ignorant; योगक्षेमात् – through avarice and attachment¹; वृणीते – prefers

2. Both the good and the pleasant approach the mortal man; the wise man examines them thoroughly and discriminates between

¹ yogaḥ is acquiring what one does not have, and kṣemaḥ is the preservation of it after having obtained... Śaṅkarācārya

the two; the wise man prefers the good to the pleasant, but the ignorant man chooses the pleasant for the sake of this body through avarice and attachment (for getting and keeping).

Life is a series of challenges. Moment-to-moment we are faced with, as it were, a question mark – to do or not to do – that swims towards us in the flood of time. Temptation after temptation approaches us. The future becomes the present and it is rolling over us, as it were, passes on to merge into the beginningless past. Our intellect and discrimination are called upon to value each moment independently and to come to a judgement upon things and beings. The material objects being finite, they can never remain the same even for a single moment and as such their combinations and patterns eternally present a kaleidoscopic variety. With reference to this ever-changing pattern, the thinking animal – man – is called upon to make an independent decision anew from moment-to-moment to ascertain his relationship with the external.

At each challenge, two paths, as it were, are open for us to follow. On one side we are temptingly beckoned to playfully dance through a seemingly well lit path of the pleasant, but the path ultimately leads us to a dark cave of sorrow and endless death; and on the other side lies a quite uninviting path, ill-used, winding and uphill, but that which ultimately leads us to the sunlit pasture lands and flowery meadows of eternal living and happiness! The latter path is called the path of the good.

The wise and discriminating man, at each moment, intelligently judges the various phases of the challenge he

is in, and solidly determines ever to stick to the path of the good. He continues his pilgrimage and ultimately fulfils the mission of his life. The ignorant one, on the other hand, lives like a mule following the generality and leads the path of least resistance, motivated mainly by the animal urges of his body consciousness. He follows the path of the pleasant, the sensuous modes of satisfying every demand of the ever craving senses and thus ultimately stoops so low as to commit himself to a state of eternal death in the lower scales of evolution.

These words of Lord Death give any intelligent reader a direct and effective clue to the ideal way to live life and in the end he can successfully come to claim a real and abiding success. If we are to live each moment of our life as slaves to our passions, lusts and cravings, we shall, in our thoughtlessness and indiscrimination, slowly sink down to the level of the animals, and it is certainly but natural that such two-legged animal cannot come to claim the heritage of man, which is real joy and happiness lived in the achieved self-perfections.

The beautiful idea hinted at in these two opening stanzas of the valli (section) gives us, therefore, the theory and the logic of self-effort. At each moment of challenge, the path of the pleasant and the path of the good are stretching open before us, but the Lord or God does not stand at the junction of these two roads either to abduct us through the path of the pleasant into the caves of sorrow, nor does the Almighty meet us at the crossroads to canvass our journey through the path of good.

At each moment, man has a limited freedom to follow either the path of the good or the path of the pleasant. Certainly, man has not a complete and unlimited freedom over the external circumstances; but he has been given this limited freedom to be good or to be vicious in his moment-to-moment contact with the external world. This limited liberty is the real character of freedom for man, by a wise use of which he can soar into the greater realms of perfection and become himself the God.

Religion is indeed an art of self-perfection and this is accomplished by careful living of each moment in wise and studious self-discipline. At a moment of challenge, a beginner may find that he has been instinctively driven to act viciously. The power or the force by which an individual is driven to do wicked action 'in spite of himself' is indeed not explained by that pair of idle and empty words which we so often use 'our destiny'.

It is the pattern of thought which we have deliberately developed in ourselves by repeatedly thinking in a particular symmetry during our past moments, that actually drives us into the wrong or right lines of action. Thus, a butcher or a hunter might instinctively feel it quite natural and decent to eliminate his enemy of the moment by killing, while, one who has been living and thinking in terms of non-violence might never come to think of eliminating his enemy through death. A barbarian cannibal of the African jungle might not feel any pang of conscience in killing his neighbour's child for satisfying his own hunger; while you and I, children of the modern age, living the modern ideologies of citizenship, may not think of even harming our neighbour's son, although

often he deserves more than death for the nuisance he causes for us!

Man is his mind. As we cultivate and train the mind so shall we become. Tune our minds to the impermanent lower value of negativity and we become gross, insensible, two legged animals. Train the mind to think and to act in terms of the higher and the permanent values of love, tolerance, mercy and so on, and we get ourselves cultured and perfected to become signatories in our own appointments for the future. We may choose to sign today a death warrant for the future or a life lease in godhood and we shall correspondingly come to suffer the death or enjoy the life.

This is no destiny beyond and above ourselves, we are overselves the architects of our future.

There seems to be the trend of the wise in the pregnant words of Lord Death with which he begins the second section here.



स त्वं प्रियान्प्रियरूपांश्च कामा-
नभिध्यायन्नचिकेतोऽत्यस्त्राक्षीः ।
नैतांसृङ्गां वित्तमयीमवाप्तो
यस्यां मज्जन्ति बहवो मनुष्याः ॥ ३ ॥

*sa tvam priyān-priyarūpāṃśca kāmā-
nabhidhyāyan-naciketo'tyasrākṣīḥ,
naitām-sṛṅkāṃ vittamayīm-avāpto
yasyām majjanti bahavo manuṣyāḥ. (3)*

सः त्वं – such as you are; प्रियान् – desirable (beloved); प्रियरूपां
च – and pleasant in appearance; कामान् – desires (desirable
objects); अभिध्यायन् – judging them; नचिकेतः – O Naciketā;
अत्यस्त्राक्षीः – (you have) renounced; एतां – these; सृङ्गां – chains (the
path); वित्तमयीम् – road of wealth; न अवाप्तः – has not accepted;
यस्यां – in which; मज्जन्ति – drown; बहवः – many; मनुष्याः – men

*3. O Naciketā! Thou hast renounced all these desires and
pleasurable objects of pleasant appearances, judging them by
their real merits, thou hast not accepted this 'road of wealth' in
which many mortals sink.*

Herein we are listening to an irrepressible outburst of
applause which rose from the bosom of Lord Death, when he
found that such a young Brāhmaṇa boy as Naciketā was able
to withstand all the trials and temptations. The temptations
with which Lord Death wanted to lead the boy into the
meshes of sensuous life were such that the entire kingdom
of mankind would have easily fallen a victim to them, even
if they are not openly invited to enjoy them ! That this boy
resisted all these temptations and found the strength for the
same in his power of intellectual discrimination between the
Real and the false is an occasion for Lord Death to cheer and
applaud him, for rare indeed are such chances for a great
Master to have the blessings of meeting an equally great
student.

Naciketā has been offered not only sons and grandsons,
all to live as centenarians, but also music and dance, and
even the free services of heavenly nymphs. But all these were
mere trifles and insignificant toys to the matured spiritual
personality in Naciketā.

The word 'sṛṅkām' has been interpreted both as a 'garland' and also as the 'path'. It may mean to say that Lord Death is surprised at the sense of detachment in Naciketā. as evidenced in his rejection of the present of the jewelled garland or as evidenced in this general disgust exhibited for walking the path of wealth.



दूरमेते विपरीते विषूची
अविद्या या च विद्येति ज्ञाता ।
विद्याभीप्सिनं नचिकेतसं मन्ये
न त्वा कामा बहवोऽलोलुपन्त ॥ ४ ॥

*dūramete viparīte viṣūcī
avidyā yā ca vidyeti jñātā,
vidyābhīpsinaṁ naciketasam manye
na tvā kāmā bahavo'lolupanta. (4)*

दूरम् – wide; एते – these are; विपरीते – opposite (apart); विषूची – leading to different ends; अविद्या – ignorance; या – what; च – and; विद्येति – as knowledge; ज्ञाता – is known; विद्याभीप्सिनं – desirous of knowledge; नचिकेतसं – Naciketā; मन्ये – I believe; न = not; त्वा – you; कामाः – objects of desires; बहवः – many; अलोलुपन्त – shake

4. These two, ignorance and what is known as Knowledge, are wide apart and lead to different ends or goals. I believe Naciketā to be one who is desirous of Knowledge, for, even many objects of pleasure have not shaken thee.

These first four stanzas may constitute among themselves the stream of thoughts that came to flash through the mind of Lord Death when his team of temptations and trials was so efficiently blockaded at the portals of Nachiketā's bosom by the seeker's own dispassion (vairāgya) and discrimination (viveka).

Lord Death estimates his observation and the result of his experiment with Naciketā in this stanza. He says that the path of the pleasant and the path of the good are both eternally different from each other, since they diverge to reach two different points or destinations, which in their very nature are as opposing as light and darkness. The path of the pleasant is the path of ignorance and the path of the good is the path of knowledge. The supreme Knowledge, the science of sciences, the Brahnavidyā, can be given out only to one who is a sedulous pursuer of the path of Truth. Since Naciketā has been proved to be one who is a staunch devotee of the path of the good, Lord Death here decides in his mind that the Brāhmaṇa boy is indeed a fit student for this great Knowledge.



अविद्यायामन्तरे वर्तमानाः
स्वयं धीराः पण्डितम्मन्यमानाः ।
दन्द्रम्यमाणाः परियन्ति मूढा
अन्धेनैव नीयमाना यथान्धाः ॥ ५ ॥

*avidyāyām-antare vartamānāḥ
svayaṁ dhīrāḥ paṇḍitam-manyamānāḥ,
dandramyamāṇāḥ pariyanti mūḍhā
andhenaiva nīyamānā yathāndhāḥ. (5)*

अविद्यायाम् – in ignorance; अन्तरे – in the midst; वर्तमानाः – who live; स्वयं धीराः – wise themselves; पण्डितम् – learned; मन्यमानाः – fancying themselves; दन्द्रम्यमाणाः – deluded in many crooked ways; परियन्ति – go round and round; मूढाः – the ignorant; अन्धेन – by the blind; एव – verily; नीयमानाः – being led; यथा – as; अन्धाः – the blind

5. The ignorant, who live in the midst of darkness but fancy themselves to be wise and learned, go round and round deluded in many crooked ways, just as the blind being led by the blind.

The comparison used here is so impressive that this has become a proverbial stanza and it is often used in criticising the smaller paṇḍitas who take the duties of guiding the society or the community in their assumed privileges as men of Knowledge. Any amount of book knowledge cannot make one a real vidvān unless one has come to live in a spirit of renunciation and live actually a life dedicated to self-purification and Self-knowledge. Mere book knowledge cannot make one really wise; and a wise one need not necessarily be a great student of books, and yet can be living a life of piety and self-control.

When the mere bookworms come to glorify the ‘Seat of Rājaguru’ the society or the country led by such paṇḍitas make a direct beeline towards national ruin and international confusion. Neither mere birth nor parentage can make one a paṇḍita. When such paṇḍitas lead, Lord Death says, ‘The leader and the led would ultimately reach a similar tragic situation, at once sad and comic, just as when a blind man is led by another equally blind man!!’

Deluded in many crooked ways – As a consequence of the individual's cultivated imperfections and spiritual ignorance, he develops desires in his mind for the satisfaction of which he does karmas – good, bad and indifferent, and thus earns wealth of reactions to be suffered or enjoyed in unending future births. As a consequence of their indifference to their own real nature they develop an acute sense of ego and the consequent pain-riddled varieties of 'I'-ness and 'my'-ness.



न साम्परायः प्रतिभाति बालं
प्रमाद्यन्तं वित्तमोहेन मूढम् ।
अयं लोको नास्ति पर इति मानी
पुनः पुनर्वशमापद्यते मे ॥ ६ ॥

*na sāmparāyaḥ pratibhāti bālaṁ
pramādyantaṁ vittamohena mūḍham,
ayaṁ loko nāsti para iti mānī
punaḥ punar-vaśamāpadyate me. (6)*

न – not; साम्परायः – (the way to the) hereafter meaning, the spiritual means of attaining glorious life after death; प्रतिभाति – is apparent; बालं – to the childish; प्रमाद्यन्तं – ignorant; वित्त-मोहेन – by the glamour of wealth; मूढम् – deluded; अयं – this; लोकः – world; नास्ति – there is no; परः – other; इति – thus; मानी – thinker; पुनः पुनः – again and again; वशम् – control; आपद्यते – attains; मे – my

6. The way to the hereafter is not apparent to the ignorant man who is childish, befooled by the glamour of wealth. 'This is the only world' he thinks 'there is no other'. Thus he falls again and again under my sway.

One, who is constantly and entirely engaged in the pursuit of earning, procuring and hoarding material wealth, cannot and will not have either the time or the occasion, or the required inner subtlety of heart and head, to enquire into the possibilities of a hereafter. So long as the mind and the intellect are lying drowned in the vulgar values of life, based upon the thoughtless conclusions and instinctive identification of oneself with one's own body and so on, one shall not come to feel easily any thirst to know or to entertain any urge to go beyond the shackles of mortal limitations.

To such men, pure materialists, the life in this plane of consciousness – generally noted for its tears and sweat, passing smiles and gasping laughters – is all that life is! To them the ideals of a higher and diviner life do not even suggest as possibilities. Even if they are told of the existence of a higher realisable life of greater perfections they will have neither the intellectual capacity to grasp such a philosophical ideal nor the mental accommodation to feel the divinity.

To such childish prattlers – the materialists – this short and uncertain span of existence is all that is; a life that came from nowhere, that exhausts itself into a zero, that during its existence lives on without any reference to the past or any ambition for the future! To such men, life is a humdrum scheme of madness, inexplicable and mysterious, logical but

meaningless, confusing and confounding! And certainly, such men cannot and will not be fit ones for philosophical contemplation, or for the pursuit of strict and conscious life of self-control or for the voluntary insistence of a constant self-discipline.



श्रवणायापि बहुभिर्यो न लभ्यः
 शृण्वन्तोऽपि बहवो यं न विद्युः ।
 आश्चर्यो वक्ता कुशलोऽस्य लब्धा-
 श्रयो ज्ञाता कुशलानुशिष्टः ॥ ७ ॥

*śravaṇāyāpi bahubhiryo na labhyaḥ
 śṛṇvanto'pi bahavo yaṁ na vidyuh,
 āścaryo vaktā kuśalo'sya labdhā-
 ścaryo jñātā kuśalānu-śiṣṭaḥ. (7)*

श्रवणाय – to hear; अपि – even; बहुभिः – by many; यः – who (the Ātman); न लभ्यः – not available; शृण्वन्तः – having heard; अपि – even; बहवः – many; यं – whom; न – not; विद्युः – have known; आश्चर्यः – wonderful; वक्ता – who tells (the Teacher); कुशलः – proficient (rare); अस्य – to this; लब्धा – the recipient (the pupil); आश्चर्यः – wonderful; ज्ञाता – who comprehends; कुशलानुशिष्टः – taught by a proficient preceptor

7. He (the Self) of whom many are not able even to hear, whom many, even when they hear of Him, do not comprehend. Wonderful is a man (Teacher), when found, who is able to teach the Self. Wonderful is he (the pupil) who comprehends the Self, when taught by an able Teacher.

Lord Death continues his 'thinking out aloud' and roars this truth which has been an inspiration even for Śrī Bhagavān Vyāsa. In fact *Kaṭhōpaniṣad* seems to have been the main inspiration for Bhagavān Vyāsa to produce the immortal love classic, *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*. Later on we shall find many stanzas lifted up even as such from this Upaniṣad by the philosopher-poet in his greatest work of literature and wisdom, *Śrīmad Bhagavad-gītā*.¹

It is indeed a well accepted fact in all the Indian schools of philosophy that the higher themes of transcendental contemplation are prescribed only for a select few who have come up to the required evolutionary progress in the inner instruments of thought and feeling. This does not mean to claim that Brahmanidyā is a secret knowledge to be preserved in airtight tombs in a dark corner of some dilapidated temple, and that the Brāhmaṇa priests should sit guarding over it like wandering ghosts that guard their treasures secreted away under some jungle tree!! Nor does it mean that like a dog guarding with a vengeance a haystack, the priests should bark at innocent and starving cows that come to enjoy the fund of Knowledge piled up in the Upaniṣads. Whatever may be the wise-looking quotations the present-day paṇḍitas may bring forth to establish the monopoly of knowledge to a special class or people, it shall all be a blasphemy against the very spirit of the God-men who had given us the śāstras!

The eternal law provides each one of us with circumstances in life and an occasion to enjoy or suffer strictly according to and in continuation of our past. Nothing

¹ *manuṣyāṇām sahasreṣu... – Gītā-7.3*

happens in fits and starts. There are no accidents. Moment-to-moment life is progressive, continual and logical. There is a strict mathematics about it all. As such, it is not the lot of everyone even to hear of a greater and imminent Truth that pervades and penetrates, the fleeting panorama of life's existence cycle which is apparent, obvious and realistic and day by day, about and around us.

That this is a pure statement of fact and not an exaggeration of a missionary, should be by now clear to many of you during these days of the jñāna-yajña. Many of you had even come to this very sādhu to report how their relations were daily canvassed by them to come and attend the great yajña. Those who had been persuaded to come up to this very door could stand only on the roadside and had, alas, suddenly remembered the box that had been left open or of the office key that had been kept on the table, and so had to hurry home, before the evening's satsaṅga had actually started!!

Those of you who are now here regularly attending may rest assured that they are the rarest few who have come to earn this privilege in the lives before. An assembly of devotees, meeting at a place for purposes of discussing and singing the glories of the Lord, needs no chawkidar¹ at the doors! The fit one, who carries the 'ticket' alone has an admission into it. It is absurd on the part of a mortal, a seeker himself, to pass judgement upon the fitness or otherwise of another seeker, in the absence of the data necessary for arriving at a correct judgement.

³ watchman – A person engaged in security duties.

Preach Vedānta, if necessary, wherever thou wilt, the fittest one alone will hear the message. Others will be shouldered out by the very authority of the eternal law. Translate the Upaniṣad into any language you like, distribute them freely round the globe, and yet, it is only the fittest ones that shall ever come even to peep into it!

The secrecy of this secret document need not be guarded by man-made protections! This is not an atom bomb secret discovered in a spirit of hatred and preserved as a shameless declaration of man's lust and passion. Brahmanvidyā is the science of Truth not born of human mind and intellect and is not maintained for purpose of asserting the lower animal urges in us. As such, the very science has a secret potency to guard itself against all undeserving intruders.

Even when heard, the theme of Brahmanvidyā is not easy to be understood. Even to understand the right import of the words heard in all their deepest significances, the student needs an inordinate inner purity and the consequent intellectual sharpness. The steadiness of our minds and the acuteness of our intellect are not accidental happenings but are the product of continued and conscious living of the Life Divine. It is with this principle in mind that our śāstras prescribe for lesser adhikārīs (less fit aspirants) the discipline of karma and upāsanā (worship and meditation). These form the most important technique by which a 'lesser one' – one of a 'lower standard' is purified, ennobled and cultured to a greater degree of competency.

It is only when the great ideas of Truth and immortality, heard either directly from a Guru or indirectly from a textbook, are well digested in intellectual reflections, can they leave any strong impression upon the listener. Study of the Upaniṣad cannot be pursued in a spirit of drowsy idleness in which one can enjoy a six penny detective novel.

Wonderful is the man who is able to teach – Indeed, if fit students are rare, real Masters who can deliver the goods, are also rare! A true Teacher is one who is not only a God-man in his subjective experience of Truth but he is also one who is a great Master in the textbooks of the Upaniṣad. The qualities of a Teacher are thus described in our sacred books as śrotriyaṃ and brahmaniṣṭhaṃ (well versed in the śāstras and well-established in the God-consciousness).¹ The paṇḍitas have the former qualification fully but they lack the supreme experience of a direct perception of Truth. Many are the well-known saints and sages who have an intimate personal experience of Truth but have, unfortunately, not the proficiency and mastery over the textbooks. But these classes cannot claim a right to ‘Gurudom’. It is with this idea in mind that Lord Death exclaims that a ‘true Teacher is a wonder’.

It should not be construed that a true Teacher is a wonder because of the length of his ‘jaṭā’² or because he sleeps not, eats not or goes about naked. These external symbols have nothing to do in determining whether one is fit to be a Guru or not. Beware! Many aspirants have fallen into this

¹ *tadvijñānārthaṃ sa gurumevābhigacchet,
samitpāṇiḥ śrotriyaṃ brahmaniṣṭhaṃ.* – Muṇḍakopaniṣad-1.2.12

² long hair of renunciates.

mistake of accepting the outer show to find in the end the inner hollowness!!.

Wonderful is he who comprehends – What a rare percentage of the whole can, in each generation come to live the voiceless joy of life's fulfilment! The chance to hear is rare; even when heard, people who can digest and understand those subtle ideas are rarer; a Master, who is efficient enough to initiate a student into the Absolute and satisfying all his doubts, guide him into the realms beyond is 'rarer-er' and even when an individual is lucky enough to enjoy the blessings of all above three, Lord Death says, only the luckiest one comes to experience godhood in this very birth while listening to the Teacher discoursing upon the Śruti texts.

Friends, from the above you should not conclude that if it is so rare and difficult, none of us shall ever succeed! Why not? Are you not the rarest few, who are regularly attending the jñāna-yajña? On this globe of ours, in these days of irresponsible and licentious breeding, seething millions are being roasted in sorrow and salted with tears to the devil's own taste! Are you not then the very few indeed who are listening to this science of life?

No true seeker has a right to be pessimistic; he should be ever consciously optimistic. Remember, behind each one of you there stands a million who can, at their best, grace only the lower rungs of the ladder of evolution. It is for the 'man-animal' that Brahmavidyā is rare and difficult. To those who are in the 'man-man' state of evolution, the achievement of the goal of life is but a mere question of choice and a

walk into the temple of perception! Be optimistic; and if you cannot, each of you may take it from Chinmaya. 'Thou art a fit adhikārī, and with a little self-effort thou shalt reach, in this very birth, the supreme success and the godly achievement. Never hesitate, never doubt, but sincerely strive and achieve.'



न नरेणावरेण प्रोक्त एष
सुविज्ञेयो बहुधा चिन्त्यमानः ।
अनन्यप्रोक्ते गतिरत्र नास्ति
अणीयान्द्यतर्क्यमणुप्रमाणात् ॥ ८ ॥

*na nareṇāvareṇa prokta eṣa
suvijñeyo bahudhā cintyamānaḥ,
ananyaprokte gatiratra nāsti
aṇīyān-hyatarkeyam-aṇupramānāt. (8)*

न – not; नरेण – by man; अवरेण – with inferior intellect; प्रोक्तः – instructed; एषः – this (Self); सुविज्ञेयः – easy to be known; बहुधा – in various ways; चिन्त्यमानः – to be thought of; अनन्य – not by other (superior); प्रोक्ते – when taught; गतिः – goal (way); अत्र – here; न अस्ति – there is no; अणीयान् – subtler; द्यतर्क्यम् – verily not to be argued; अणुप्रमाणात् – than the subtlest

8. This (Self), when taught by a man of inferior intellect is not easy to be known, as it is to be thought of in various ways. But when it is taught by another (superior) preceptor who is one with Brahman (who beholds no difference), there is no doubt concerning it, the Self being subtler than the subtlest and is not to be obtained by arguing.

Much of the explanations already given under the last stanza must throw enough light upon this mantra. For purposes of emphasis Lord Death is here voicing forth the very ideas suggested in the earlier stanza. We have already found that neither mere book knowledge nor book learning nor mere experience can be complete qualification for a perfect Guru to serve the world at large. And when a man of knowledge and experience explains the Śruti mantra, the disciple, if he is perfectly conditioned, gains the complete Knowledge instantaneously.

In this mantra the words ‘ananyaprokte’ and ‘gati’ have been explained by Śaṅkarācārya to hint at four different meanings –

- (i) If the Ātman is taught by a preceptor who is free from the notion of duality and has thus become one with the Absolute, the student shall have no doubts in the explanations.
- (ii) When the Ātman, which is none other than the disciple’s own Self is taught, there can be no more doubt.
- (iii) The word ‘gatiḥ’ may mean ‘passage’; then the meaning would be that when the Ātman, not distinct from the Self, has been taught, there shall be no more travelling in saṃsāra.
- (iv) We may take the words as ananya-prokte-agatiḥ... in which case the interpretation is that, when Brahma-vidyā is given by one who is himself well-established in Truth Consciousness, there will be no lingering doubts (agati) in the bosom of the student.

There are critics who try to prove that Śaṅkara is here giving his own interpretation upon the text. According to them ‘ananya prokte-gatir-atra-nāsti’ must mean a simple and direct translation – ‘Not taught by another, there is no way thither.’ It is true that this rendering is simple but it is naked and horrid. Śakuntalā’s virgin perfections and the vivacity of her ethereal spirit are not in her skeleton lying crumbled and burnt on her funeral pyre! They can no more smile and send thrills of love through anyone! Such a direct translation ruins the glorious beauty of her text.

The above different interpretations are taken here in such detail only with a view to introducing you all into the laborious but ultra-intelligent ways in which Śaṅkarācārya and other commentators have approached this sacred Bible of our religion before they have concluded and established the Truth of these mantras. The potency of intelligence, the quietude of mind, the serenity of tempo, sincerity, faith and devotion which these masterminds could bring to play upon their work while they were at their desk, bear something of a model of extra genius that we, individually or in teams, can never hope to gather and apply in our meditations upon these mantras. In short, it would be a compliment to our own intelligence if we were to accept Śrī Śaṅkara’s conclusions in toto. It is with this idea in mind that we have today gone into such lengthy discussions upon the four interpretations given by Śaṅkara to two insignificant phrases.



नैषा तर्केण मतिरापनेया
प्रोक्तान्येनैव सुज्ञानाय प्रेष्ठ ।
यां त्वमापः सत्यधृतिर्बतासि
त्वादृङ्नो भूयान्नचिकेतः प्रष्टा ॥ ९ ॥

*naiṣā tarkēṇa matirāpaneyā
proktānyenaiva sujñānāya preṣṭha,
yām tvamāpaḥ satyadhṛtir-batāsi
tvādr̥ṇno bhuyān-naciketah praṣṭā. (9)*

नैषा – not this; तर्केण – by (mere) argumentation; मतिः – knowledge (about Ātmā); आपनेया – attainable; प्रोक्ता – said (taught); अन्येन – by another; एव – indeed; सुज्ञानाय – by easy comprehension; प्रेष्ठ – dear one; यां – that; त्वम् – you; आपः – have obtained; सत्यधृतिः – fixed in Truth; बतासि – you are; त्वादृक् – like you; नः – to us; भूयात् – may he be; नचिकेतः – O Naciketā; प्रष्टा – the enquiries

9. This knowledge which thou hast obtained is not attainable by argumentation; it is easy to understand it, O dearest! when taught by a Teacher who beholds no difference (between oneself and another); thou hast obtained it now, thou art fixed in Truth. May we have, O Naciketā! an enquirer like thee!

This is probably the first time when Lord Death who has, all along, been choked with appreciation for his great disciple, has come to compliment the boy quite directly. As a corollary to the previous two stanzas, Lord Death states that Truth is not a theme that can be reached or understood by a play of the intellect. Mere reasoning can cover only the frontiers of the world of objects. The land of Truth lies extended beyond the frontiers of the mind and the intellect.

We have already seen during our discussions of the mantras of the *Kenopaniṣad* that the Reality in us, the Spark of Life, is the controller and the prompter behind the mere dead matter envelopments around, called our mind and intellect.¹ In fact, they are insentient and inert. The dead matter that constitutes them gains a verisimilitude of life when they are in contact with the all dynamic Life Centre in us called the Ātman. This divine Spark vitalises the mind and the intellect, and it is only then that they function through their evident feelings and willings.

Since the Ātman is thus the director of the mind and the intellect, it is obvious that they, being mere instruments, cannot, of themselves, come to discover the energy behind them. However smart we may be in seeing with our eyes, we cannot see our own eyes with our eyes; however tired you may be, you cannot ride for a yard upon yourself. Similarly, the mind and the intellect cannot make Truth an object for their observation and analysis. The moment the Truth is detached from the observing mind and the analysing intellect, the poor mind and the intellect become inert and dead. A driver cannot be run over by the very car he is driving; the moment the driver is out of his driving seat, and runs towards the front of the car, the wheels stop. Similarly, the Ātman, the vitaliser and director of the intellect, when removed from its place and brought before to be analysed by the intellect, it as an object for its analysis, the intellect becomes dead. Hence, Lord Death says, 'This knowledge is not to be obtained by arguments.'

¹ Refer Swāmiji's discourses on *Kenopaniṣad*.

If the ordinary instruments of knowledge, such as the mind and the intellect, cannot discover the Truth, we are not to conclude that the entire Vaidika literature is discussing a covetable but unrealisable goal. An unending line of Masters of God-realisation, expressing their own intimate subjective experience of the divinity that is all-pervading, are the various Upaniṣads which form the third book of each Veda. Even in our own time, and in recent history, we have brilliant examples of God-men who lived with us, mortals in form but immortal gods in spirit.

This Self-realisation is not an impossibility. Rather, to realise the godhood that now lies dormant in each one of us is the heritage of man. This embodied existence as man, is fulfilled only with this superb achievement. From the egg shells of our limitations, we can, through a scientific process of self purification and growth, grow out into the stature and dimension, might and power, wisdom and perfection of God. Reaching this state of Perfection is the accomplishment of the goal, the evolution; and man is great, in the sense that he alone has the instruments necessary and the powers of application required for hastening nature's own process of evolution.

If this perfection is achievable, what is the import of Lord Death's words that Truth cannot be known by the intelligence? This inability of our intelligence is explained in the second half of the first line that 'It is to be thought of in various ways.' If we bring into the realm of philosophy only our gross intellect to conceive and to visualise, there can be as many different conclusions as there are heads that come to play upon this question.

Naciketā has stood all the trials and he has been found to be the fittest candidate for instructions in Vedānta, and as such, Lord Death says, 'You have already reached the goal of Brahmanidyā' although, even the first lecture on the topic has not yet been given out. The actual delay in Self-realisation is only in gaining, by ourselves, for ourselves, the required inner purification. If once this is gained and the seeker is thus completely conditioned, the actual flight into the realms of experience in godhood is but an efficient gliding through a thrilled silence of self-discovery.

The stanza concludes with a prayer rising from the very bottom of the kind heart of Śrī Dharmarāja, and he says, 'May we have many enquirers like thee.' This is the ardent cry of all true Teachers who are blessed with innate and irresistible missionary zeal. With this ideal in mind, when we look around, if we can rarely see a true teacher among our schoolmasters, it is a sad commentary on the disgusting fall of not only the teacher-class but also of the very spirit of the community of the taught. These are the days when the very schoolmasters strike their work, demanding more pay. Naturally, the world of students also must come to look down upon the teachers as their paid servants who shall serve their paymasters, the taught, as it pleases them!



जानाम्यहं शेषधिरित्यनित्यं
न ह्यधुवैः प्राप्यते हि ध्रुवं तत् ।
ततो मया नाचिकेतश्चितोऽग्नि-
रनित्यैर्द्रव्यैः प्राप्तवानस्मि नित्यम् ॥ १० ॥

*jānāmyaham śevadhirityanityam
na hyadhruvaiḥ prāpyate hi dhruvam tat,
tato mayā nāciketāścito'gniḥ
anityairdravyaiḥ prāptavānasmi nityam. (10)*

जानाम्यहम् – I know; शेषधिः – treasure (results of karma); इति – that; अनित्यं – transient; न – not; हि – verily; अध्रुवैः – by the non-eternal; प्राप्यते – is obtained; हि – for; ध्रुवं – eternal; तत् – that; ततः – yet; मया – by me; नाचिकेतः अग्निः – Nāciketā's fire; चितः – propitiated; अनित्यैः – with perishable; द्रव्यैः – things; प्राप्तवानस्मि – I have obtained; नित्यम् – eternal

10. Know that the 'treasure' is transient, for that which is Eternal is not obtained by things which are not eternal. Therefore, (yet) the Nāciketā's fire has been propitiated by me with the perishable things and I have obtained the Eternal.

In paying tributes to his great disciple, Lord Death is here comparing his own past foolishness, which of course he, in his new found wisdom, has got over, though he has to suffer, yet for long, for his wrong actions committed in the past. He admits that he knows the perishable nature of the (śevadhi) 'treasure' meaning 'the fruits of actions'. Karma is done with the help of things which are in themselves perishable. Anything that is made or resulted out of things perishable, can produce but a fruit or a result which is equally perishable. Out of a mass of mud we can make a breakable mudpot, it would be futile for us to hope to make out of it even tiny ornament of gold! Man, wishing for an unending and limitless joy, pursues the path of the good and performs sacrifices advised and sanctioned by the śāstras.

Here Lord Death is hinting at the ephemeral nature of even the ethereal joy when it is compared with the truly Eternal and the Infinite.

The offices of Indra, Sun, Moon, Varuṇa, Agni, Vāyu and others, who were the only gods of form known to the devotees of the Vaidika period, are all appointments given to such egocentric jīvas who, during their existence as mortals, have pursued such life and performed such actions with a desire to gain these appointments (padavīs), and so, in order to enjoy the fruits thereof, they have come to identify themselves to be these office bearers. This is the general philosophic belief of all schools of philosophy, especially of Vaiśeṣikas. Lord Death is here providing the source of authority for this belief of our philosophers when he says that he has, in his mortal days, performed the Nāciketas sacrifice and has, therefore, come to adorn the chair of Lord Death.

‘I have obtained the Eternal.’ It is only a relative eternity that is meant here. Compared with the hourly death in the mortal plane, the office of Lord Death which is generally continuous and unbroken till the deluge (pralaya), is eternal indeed.

In short, Lord Death, comparing himself and his own ideas at a time when he was himself a seeker like Naciketā, expressed his deepest appreciation for the extraordinary and blessed viveka (discrimination) and vairāgya (detachment) in his disciple.

Some commentators, put this stanza into the mouth of Naciketā. It cannot be in any sense acceptable, since we know that the boy was initiated into this fire-sacrifice only just then.



कामस्याप्तिं जगतः प्रतिष्ठां
क्रतोरनन्त्यमभयस्य पारम् ।
स्तोममहदुरुगायं प्रतिष्ठां दृष्ट्वा
धृत्या धीरो नचिकेतोऽत्यस्त्राक्षीः ॥ ११ ॥

*kāmasyāptim jagataḥ pratiṣṭhām
krator-anantyamabhayasya pāram,
stoma-mahadurugāyaṁ pratiṣṭhām dr̥ṣṭvā
dhr̥tyā dhīro naciketo'tyasrākṣiḥ. (11)*

कामस्य – of desires; आप्तिं – the fulfilment; जगतः – of the world; प्रतिष्ठां – foundation; क्रतोः – of the sacrifice; अनन्त्यम् – endless (rewards); अभयस्य – of fearlessness; पारम् – the other shore; स्तोम – praiseworthy; महत् – great; उरुगायं – wide extended sphere; प्रतिष्ठां – abode of the soul; दृष्ट्वा – hast seen; धृत्या – with firm resolve; धीरः – wise man; नचिकेतः – O Naciketā; अत्यस्त्राक्षी – you have rejected

11. 'The end of all desires, the foundation of the world, the endless rewards of sacrifices, the other shore where there is no fear, the praiseworthy, the great and the wide extended sphere and the abode of the soul – all these thou hast seen, and being wise, O Naciketā! thou hast with firm resolve rejected them all.'

It seems that the qualities in this ideal disciple which deserve a full throated compliment are unending and inexhaustible. When the enthusiasm of the Teacher gains more and more fire, the more he does kīrtanam upon the qualities of the ideal Vedānta student.

The Hiranyagarbha state, otherwise called Brahma-loka, has been the one goal of all mortals. No worshipper can courageously stand away from the charms of the unending joys in this captivating realm of perfections as constituted in the total mind or intellect. Every performer of sacrifices (karma), if analysed, shall show himself to be psychologically craving to make a beeline, to Brahma-loka to enjoy there for a time at least, and thereafter to gain Kaivalya at the time of dissolution through the processes of gradual Liberation (Kramamukti).

Lord Death is surprised here on seeing that his disciple is not tempted even by the subtlest of joys, which a mortal can hope to enjoy through sense organs.

The various adjectival phrases used in the stanza all go to qualify the state of Hiranyagarbha.

The stay of all the universe – The Hiranyagarbha state is the first emergence of the manifested world from its unmanifest conditions. To compare this with a parallel would be to say that the total mind state is the sprout that peeps out at first to begin its career as a tree from its earlier unmanifest condition in the seed. In this case, just as we can see that sprout is the support of the tree, similarly, the grosser manifestations, constituted of the universe, are said to be supported by the state of Hiranyagarbha. The entire worlds of adhyātma

(bodies), adhibhūta (element), and adhidaiva (god) are supported by the Hiranyagarbha.

The wide extended (uru-gāyam) – The term ‘wide going’ is used in *Ṛg-veda* as an epithet for soma; ‘far striding’ for Viṣṇu and wide opening glory of the early dawn.

According to Śaṅkara, that which is sacrificed and rejected by Naciketā is the Hiranyagarbha – the total mind identification. Though this Hiranyagarbha idea is first mentioned in the famous creation hymn¹ of *Ṛg-veda*, as the first born in the creation process, this idea never developed as we have it in later Vedānta – *Śvetāśvatara-upaniṣad* – during the early Upaniṣads. And, therefore, Śaṅkarācārya’s reading can be considered as an anachronism if we view *Kaṭhopeniṣad* as separate from the later Upaniṣads.

Being intelligent thou hast rejected them all – Here is a clear compliment paid to the sense of discrimination and the quality of detachment which Lord Death has noticed in his disciple. The true seeker in Naciketā is impatient at any compromise with his highest demand to attain and achieve the suprememost state of Perfection.



तं दुर्दर्शं गूढमनुप्रविष्टं
गुहाहितं गह्वरेष्ठं पुराणम् ।
अध्यात्मयोगाधिगमेन देवं
मत्वा धीरो हर्षशोकौ जहाति ॥ १२ ॥

¹ *Puruṣa-sūktam*

*taṁ durdarśaṁ gūḍhamanupraviṣṭaṁ
guhāhitaṁ gahvareṣṭhaṁ purāṇaṁ,
adhyātmayogādhigamena devaṁ
matvā dhīro harṣaśokau jahāti. (12)*

तं – him; दुर्दर्शं – difficult to see; गूढम् – subtle (hidden); अनुप्रविष्टं – inaccessibly located; गुहाहितं – seated (hidden) in the cavity of the heart; गह्वरेष्ठं – dwells in the abyss (a vast bottomless, boundless pit); पुराणम् – ancient; अध्यात्मयोगाधिगमेन – by means of meditation on the inner Self; देवं – the Lord; मत्वा – having recognised, realised; धीरः – the wise man; हर्ष – joys; शोकौ – and sorrows; जहाति – renounces

12. The wise sage, who, by means of the meditation on the inner Self, recognises the Ancient, who is difficult to be seen, who is unfathomable and concealed, who is hidden in the cave of the heart, who dwells in the abyss, is lodged in the intelligence and, seated amidst miserable surroundings indeed – renounces joy and sorrow.

Having rejected the state of Hiraṇyagarbha, upon what should a true seeker's heart be fixed? Is there anything subtler to be realised whereby a greater perfection can be achieved? These questions naturally rise up in the mind of any student who is pursuing a study of *Kaṭhōpaniṣad*. And with the Teacher's answer to these questions, starts the real Upaniṣad. With this stanza starts the entire discussion of the theory and the technique of self-perfection.

Lord Death in this statement clearly indicated that there is an eternal Truth far subtler than the state of the total

mind and that a seeker can discover It and realise It as ‘This I am’ – *ayaṁ ahaṁ asmi* – in an intimate personal experience. The various descriptive phrases used in this stanza indicate this Truth factor which is the real essence and the real entity behind the ‘I’-sense of *ahaṅkāra* (ego) in each embodied soul.

purāṇam (Ancient) – The Truth Principle that controls and directs the matter envelopments constituted by the body, mind and intellect and so on, is indeed ancient, because, It, in Its essence, has never been born. Just as the space in a pot and the all-pervading space is one and the same, irrespective of the pot’s existence or destruction, so too the pure Consciousness or the light of Wisdom as such has neither been ever born nor will It ever know any decay or death. Thus the unborn, undecaying, deathless *Ātman* can only be indicated by the word ‘Ancient’.

durdarśam (hard to see) – Truth being thus the presiding intelligence that lends Its life to the dead and inert coatings of matter which seemingly envelop It, it is difficult for the eye to see It. The eye, being an instrument, can only see objects other than itself; it can never hope to see itself.¹ A telescope cannot be used for viewing the very eye of the observer himself. In this sense the controller and director of the eye, the *Ātman*, cannot be seen by the eye. It is to be noted here carefully that in negating the capacity of the ‘eyes’ to see Truth, the intention of the Śruti is to negate the capacity of all other sense organs such as, the mind and the intellect to visualise, feel or know the subtle Truth as an object. In short, Truth Realisation or *Īśvara Darśana* is not earned through the same process as those by which

¹ Refer discourses on *Kenopaniṣad* by Swamiji

we see an object, feel an emotion or know an idea. Truth can only be subjectively experienced as the experiencer's own Self.

gūḍham-anupraviṣṭam (lodged in the innermost recess) – Certainly, to limit the all-pervading Ātman as lodged in the innermost recess is to deny it! But Lord Death is no blasphemer and Śruti is not the work of Ingersoll! By using this epithet the Upaniṣad is not denying Truth any existence outside but she means to indicate that It is the subtlest principle in us.

The grossest matter envelopment, the fleshy body, is the outermost covering. Still within, as it were, is the prāṇa (the vital air) and certainly, we know that the prāṇa is subtler than matter with form, subtlety being measured always with reference to its greater pervasiveness (vyāpakatvam).

Subtler than the prāṇa is the mind, since if the disturbances created by our prāṇa can influence a larger area around us than the space occupied by our body, the thought disturbances which our minds can create are certainly much more! Thus the mind is conceived of as residing in a deeper point within us than the area covered by the prāṇa.

Compared with the mind, prāṇa and body, we have the still subtler, hence a deeper point governed by the intelligence; still deeper is the bliss sheath.

The Ātman or the Truth, the source of all life in us, the spark of the Divine touch that vitalises, controls and directs all the above-mentioned five sheaths, constituted merely of

the inert matter, must necessarily be the subtlest of the subtle, hence occupying the holy of the holies in us. It is in this sense that the Śruti says here that the Truth or Ātman resides in the innermost recess. This is equivalent to saying that water resides in ice and steam lies in the core of the water.

guhāhitam (hidden in the cave of the heart) – It is an ancient Āryan concept, sanctioned by the Vedas and acceptable even today, that in the cave of the heart is the seat of true intelligence. To a modern microscope gazer, whose philosophy rises no higher than the principle of ‘see to believe’ this statement may read absurd, for to him intelligence is lodged in the brain. But if we walk from the laboratory to the library and listen to the opinion of great authors of what true intelligence is, we shall even today hear quite a different story. The immortal Shakespeare himself has caricatured more than one of his immortal characters to show that pure intelligence divorced from the softness of emotions amounts to brutality and villainy!

All poets and men of letters, philosophers and thinkers, in short, all, but the matter-of-fact scientists, roar in unison that enduring thoughts can bubble up only when an intellect is sweetened by the syrup of the heart.

In spiritual self-discovery also, an intellect tempered by the qualities of the heart alone can be of service. And this truth is pointed out by the general acceptance in the Vedas that intelligence resides in the cave of the heart and Self-realisation is gained through a controlled application of a happy synthesis of both the head and the heart.

gahvareṣṭham (seated amidst miserable surroundings) – To an ordinary man steeped in his own delusions and living the life of slavery to his own desires, passions and loves, ideas, hopes and ambitions, low negativities as jealousies and hatreds, indeed the cave of the heart is ever in a medley of maddening thoughts. In the midst of these, the saṃsārin's intellect, overworked and exhausted, weary and forlorn, is not at all efficient to ponder over the transcendental Truth and the nature of the Self. Hence, the aptness of this expression.

If the Self is thus, incomprehensible and unknowable, does it not amount to declaring that it is impossible to know or to reach this Perfection state? And the Indian philosopher is not satisfied by a mere view of life which cannot be realised as a practical, subjective experience. In this very stanza, true to the spirit of the Indian thought and practical ambition of the Āryan seekers, therefore, there is a pointed declaration of a 'way of life' (or a technique) by which seeker can come to experience this state of Perfection, the Selfhood or the godhood.

adhyātma-yoga (the technique of meditation) – This is the only place where this word appears in this Upaniṣad and so it is very difficult to ascertain what Yama meant by it. As a matter of fact, this is the first occasion in the entire literature of the Upaniṣads we have the mention of 'Yoga' as a term. 'Yoga' the word, comes from the root 'yuj' to join or unite. Earliest usage of this root was in the sense to yoke horses, bulls and so on. It is later on that the word developed into a complete śāstra and today it has a meaning of exertion of

disciplined activity of the body; and with reference to the mind, it means concentration or control through meditation. Śāṅkarācārya, therefore, combines both these meanings and says 'yoga' is deep meditation (samādhāna) with thoughts withdrawn from external objects.

In this initial stage of its career, yoga as used in *Kaṭhapaniṣad* indicates a positive meaning of meditation, while in its later history, as in *Pātañjali Yogasūtras*, it has gained almost a negative aspect, namely, sense suppression and a morbid retirement from bodily activities.

The impossible is achieved through the process of self perfection called meditation. Meditation is the process by which a purified mind, and therefore, a highly concentrated mind, is brought to contemplate exclusively upon the nature of the Ātman through a total avoidance of the mind wandering into any other object of contemplation. This process of making the mind think solely through an appointed channel of thinking, to the total effective exclusion of all dissimilar thought currents eroding in to disturb and muddy the planned channel of thought, can be successful only when the meditator is weaned away from all its gross negativities.

Such a successful meditator, meditating long upon the nature of Truth, as evident within himself, in the sacred spirit of his practices, comes to gain an intimate subjective experience of godhood. Though the ordinary means and methods of getting our day-to-day objective knowledge are not available in seeking or knowing or realising Truth, there is a special method by which we can develop our powers

of intuition, which are now lying dormant in us beneath the thick layers of our own fattened encrustations and by which we can experience the Ātman. This technique of communion with the Self is the exact significance of the word 'adhyātma-yoga' here.

If Truth is so subtle, the process so very complicated, the chances so rare, the percentage of success so meagre, is it not sheer madness to renounce and to go into a quiet cave in some Himalayan jungle, to suffer privations, to starve out the body and to keep vigil over mere fantastic ideas, unrealisable and imperceptible? Is it not far better to live here sweating and toiling, weeping and sobbing, sighing and laughing, dancing and revelling? To one who asks this question, there is no real answer, if he is so low as to be nothing more than a two-legged animal! Not even the crudest of religions dares to serve such a low worm-man. How then can Brahmavidyā, which is the last textbook in religion, meant to guide a 'full-man' to the very state of godhood, cater to the worm-man? But if the questioner is one who has lived life intelligently and has come to the sane conclusion that even the best that it can give is but a hornet's nest of imperfections, sure to provide endless sorrows and pains, to him is the Upaniṣad addressed. And it is to such sādhakas or aspirants that we have here in this stanza, a declaration of the result gained when the adhyātma-yoga is pursued, and the realisation of the Self is attained. The text says that such a one renounces both joy and grief.

The ammunition hall of saṃsāra is stacked with the pairs of opposites (dvandvas) such as heat and cold, joy and

sorrow, success and failure, praise and insult and so on. The self perfected saint or sage, in his experienced godliness and Knowledge, becomes the very illumination or the knower of these opposite states of the mind, and thus becomes a mere onlooker or witness of the varied experiences of life. He thus rises, as it were, above the tyranny and persecution of the moment-to-moment experiences in life. And this is, the glory of a God-man who comes to live and bless the world by his mere presence.



एतच्छ्रुत्वा संपरिगृह्य मर्त्यः
प्रवृह्य धर्म्यमणुमेतमाप्य ।
स मोदते मोदनीयं हि लब्ध्वा
विवृतं सद्म नचिकेतसं मन्ये ॥ १३ ॥

*etacchrutvā saṁparigṛhya martyaḥ
pravṛhya dharmyamāṇumetamāpya,
sa modate modanīyaṁ hi labdhvā
vivṛtaṁ sadma naciketasam manye. (13)*

एतत् – this (Ātman); श्रुत्वा – having heard; संपरिगृह्य – having grasped well; मर्त्यः – the mortal; प्रवृह्य – abstracting, discriminating; धर्म्यम् – virtuous; अणुम् – the subtle; एतम् – this (Ātman); आप्य – attaining; सः – he; मोदते – rejoices; मोदनीयं – that which causes joy; हि – indeed; लब्ध्वा – having obtained; विवृतं – wide open; सद्म – the house (abode of Brahman); नचिकेतसं – to Naciketā; मन्ये – I think

13. *Having heard and well grasped this (the Self), the mortal abstracting the virtuous Ātman and attaining this subtle Self (this intangible Spirit), rejoices, because he has obtained that which is the cause for all rejoicing. I think that the abode of Brahman is wide open for Naciketā.*

The Absolute cannot be defined. 'If God is defined God is defiled.' God being infinite, the finite words of no language can express Him. And yet the theme of the Upaniṣads is the Truth Absolute. This is no contradiction. The Upaniṣad does not claim to define or explain Truth. It only, at its best, indicates the line of thinking, which when the seeker pursues independently, with a mind and intellect prepared earlier for the purpose, in order to experience the Truth Absolute. Language, in fact, is hollow when it comes to express actual experiences. If I go to America and there to my friend in New York I want to explain the laḍḍū (an Indian sweet meat), I shall at best give him only an objective description of the shape and other qualities of it but shall surely fail in expressing to him the actual taste experienced when an Indian laḍḍū is in the mouth.

In this stanza, Lord Death, therefore, says that a seeker who has attentively heard and understood intellectually the indications given in the last stanza can come to an intimate experience of this Life Centre within him, if he properly meditates upon the pregnant significances of the last stanza. Having known the real essence in us to be the immortal and all-pervading pure Intelligence, we shall have all our false and delusory identifications with our body-mind-intellect

equipment rolled off in our true attachment with the Truth Principle in us.

Having thus regained our real vanity in that we are not the mortal which we have been so long dreaming ourselves to be, although we are in fact nothing but the Absolute – we shall ‘rejoice’ meaning, we shall go beyond the shores of all limitations, tears, sighs and despairs.

Having obtained what causes joy – A little correct thinking shall lead us to the understanding that what causes the greatest joy to us is the knowledge of our own real nature; hence, our inordinate love for ourselves. An officer once at his office received a phone message that his house was on fire and the fire brigade was heroically fighting it down in vain. In three jumps he cleared the staircase and grabbing his hat he rushed out waving for a passing taxi. In the taxi he jumped and flew to the street, where amidst a crowd of observers, his wife and mother were weeping miserably. He approached them and missing his only child made enquiries. He came to know the despairing fact that the child was still upstairs getting slowly baked in its own cradle.

The officer standing there on the street cried out his despairing heart, “Is there not a single obliging soul in this crowd who will go into the house and bring out the child? Save my child; I shall give you a big present, nay, I shall give you all that I am today worth in this world. I want no money; I want only my child. My child, save my child,” the officer moaned, “Is there none? Won’t anyone of you oblige this poor father? Save my child.”

None came forward. And the officer got his child burnt.

Though the father sincerely loved the child, probably more than what the ordinary fathers would love, yet, he himself never for a moment thought of walking into that burning house, rushing through the flaming rooms and snatching his dear son away from the cradle. The father loved his own person more than his only son for the sake of whom he was certainly ready to sacrifice his all, except himself. The father instinctively felt that the son was but a poor hostage for his own life.

Based on this truth that we love ourselves the most, we have the famous declaration in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad*, that the mother loves the child not for the sake of the child but for the sake of the joy that the child can give to her; the husband loves the wife not because she is the wife but because of the joy she can give to himself and so on.

If thus, we really love ourselves the most, we may as well enquire what is that in us which we love the most. Let us enquire. In this body equipment if a choice is given to us to amputate a leg or prick both the eyes, our choice shall be certainly to sacrifice the leg. That is, if the choice is between an organ of action and an organ of knowledge, our preference will always be to maintain the organ of knowledge and sacrifice the organ of action.

Again supposing an organ of knowledge, say the ear, is severely paining due to an ulcer in it and if the doctor says that by an operation the pain disturbance in our mind can

be ended at the cost of the ear, the patient's choice would be to sacrifice the organ of knowledge for the sake of the much more intimate and beloved entity in us, the mind. Certainly, it is now clear, the mind is more beloved to us than the sense organs.

Friends, have you not known the stories of martyrs who have suffered privations and lived through the agonising whip of the tyrants only to maintain and to keep up their ideals and ideas? Is it not the story of our own recent history that men, born with golden spoons in their mouth, threw away in sacrifice all their belongings, renounced their successes in their professions, lived through hell, fire and lāṭhīs,¹ only to maintain their ideas of freedom and liberty? From the above it is clear that between the intellectual ideologies and the mental sufferings a cultured man will always choose the satisfaction of the intellect, showing thereby what we love and adore our intellect more than our mind.

Thus analysed we shall reach, deep within ourselves, that the very source of life, because of which the intellect, the mind and the body seem to be potent and active, is the factor most loved by us because it is the source of our maximum joy. Thus, the divine Spark that lies hidden in us, for the sake of which we are ready to sacrifice, in fact, all the grosser envelopments about It, is indeed, as the Upaniṣad says, the cause for all rejoicing!!' And when an aspirant comes to identify himself with That, who can measure the joy that is his?

¹ cane stick used by police to control mobs.

We thus realise the Self in us is nothing other than the all-pervading, all-perfect, eternal Reality, yet we see many recent enthusiasts who have, in their interpretations of the sacred Upaniṣads and in their discourses upon Vedānta, defined this supreme state as a passive dynamism, and a characterless and colourless merger with the Supreme. The supreme state of Perfection is not ‘a night in which all cows are black’ – but the stanza insists that it is a positive life of inspired joy – ‘He rejoices’ – (sa modate).

The sum total of all the compliments so far paid by Lord Death to his disciple has come to this culminating statement that the gateway to the temple of Truth is wide open for Naciketā. It means that Naciketā is a fit aspirant who even while listening to a discourse upon the Śruti mantras, can realise, in an intimate subjective experience, what pure Consciousness – the Self – is.



अन्यत्र धर्मादन्यत्राधर्मादन्यत्रास्मात्कृताकृतात् ।

अन्यत्र भूताच्च भव्याच्च यत्तत्पश्यसि तद्वद ॥ १४ ॥

*anyatra dharmād-anyatrādharmād anyatrāsmāt-kṛtākṛtāt,
anyatra bhūtācca bhavyācca yattat-paśyasi tad-vada. (14)*

अन्यत्र धर्मात् – other than virtue and; अन्यत्र – other than; अधर्मात् – vices; अन्यत्र – other than; अस्मात् – from this; कृत – effect; अकृतात् – cause; अन्यत्र – other than; भूताच्च – from the past and; भव्याच्च – from the future; यत् – which; तत् – that; पश्यसि – you see; तत् – that; वद – explain

14. *Naciketā said, "That which thou seest as other than virtue and vice, as other than cause and effect, as other than the past and future – tell me that."*

To all the compliments paid by the Guru, the only answer that the disciple knows to give seems to be to repeat his own question upon his burning doubt once again in different words. To one who is a true seeker there are no eyes and ears for applause or insults. Single pointed, the seeker knows only to pursue the one idea, the problem of his enquiry. Almost unconscious of the surroundings or of the blessings that are showered on him, Naciketā has ears only for the wisdom that will come out of the great Guru. All other talk is, to him, either meaningless prattle or a dull silence.

Naciketā, the seeker, is here enquiring of his Teacher the nature of Reality. Instead of stating it directly, he is here putting the questions as though it were a confusing conundrum. This is not to confuse the issue, nor is it a futile attempt to look himself to be very wise. On a closer enquiry, it becomes obvious that the three parts of the question, separately and together, point out the vast area that he has covered himself, independently, during his endless meditations upon the life's happenings which so far had visited him.

His enquiry points out to a Truth that lies beyond virtue and vice, which is neither the cause nor the effect, and which does not belong either to the past or to the future.

By the term 'virtue' and 'vice' it would be wise of us to understand that these represent the entire list of pairs of opposites such as joy and sorrow, success and failure,

hope and despair, health and disease and so on. Truth or the ultimate Reality being one without a second (advaita) cannot of its very nature have anything to do with one or the other of any conceivable pairs of opposites. Vice has got an existence only with reference to virtue; light can be recognised only with reference to darkness; life would be meaningless without death. Thus, if we were to accept that Truth is virtue, then that Truth cannot be absolute, for it will be limited by the existence of vice also. When there are two things, different in their nature, one must necessarily limit the other. For example, when a half tumbler of milk is watered sufficiently to fill the glass, we cannot in truth say that the glass is full of milk; the water limits the milk.

Again, if the absolute Truth in its pure, eternal nature were to have the quality of being virtuous, then Truth becomes a substance, and so, finite and perishable. It is evident, therefore, that behind the words of this question is a volume of thought pursued by a highly cultured intellect sedulously trained in the wisdom of śāstras.

Thus, the question of the Brāhmaṇa boy to Lord Death was a demand for an explanation of that unknown factor which is eternal and immortal, which, in Itself, is neither virtuous nor vicious and without which neither virtue nor vice can have any existence, at all! The question clearly demands a discussion of the Ātman, which is pure Consciousness or the Awareness in us and which is the eternal Witness beaming to illuminate equally both virtue and vice.

The street lamp of its very nature throws a pool of light on to the road. Whatever portion of the passing parade comes

into that light, gets illuminated so long as it remains within the area lit up. The lamp is a mere witness; the light neither dances in joy when a honeymooning couple passes that way, nor does the light reel in drunkenness when a reveller passes by, nor does it weep when it comes to illumine a tearful funeral procession!! Irrespective of the merits or demerits of the scene, the light, in its own nature, brightens up that which comes within its umbra.

Similarly, there is an all-witnessing eternal light of Wisdom, the divine Spark within us which is the source of all life and light and by which we become aware of the vice and virtue idea in our mind and intellect. Certainly this great Witness, the Ātman, is that which is other than virtue and vice, being Itself only a Witness.

Taking now the second part of the question, let us enquire what is that which is neither the cause nor the effect. Every effect is the fulfilment of a cause and, as such, it is nothing other than the cause itself with reference to another period of time and changed conditions. A seed sown, the cause, in time and under certain favourable conditions, becomes the effect, the seedling or the plant. All effects can be reduced similarly to their causes, and yet, each time, the question would arise, 'What had caused this cause?' Thus, we would arrive at an unending chain and this difficulty is termed in Sanskrit system of logic as 'anavasthā doṣa' (Regresso ad infinitum). In order to circumvent this absurdity, the God Principle, the accepted first cause for the manifested jagat, is considered by all schools of philosophy as 'svayambhū' – the uncaused Cause, the Self-caused Cause or the Self-born.

But the question of Naciketā goes even beyond the God Principle or the Uncaused. It is accepted as a cause, and a cause has a justification and an existence only with reference to its effects. But the theme of enquiry here, it is to be clearly understood, is of that Principle which is neither a cause nor an effect.

Thus, by this term also the Brāhmaṇa boy is enquiring of Lord Death for the nature of the witnessing light of Intelligence, which is the Knower of all the causes and effects, Himself being neither the cause nor the effect.

Lastly, by asking his Teacher to explain that which is neither the past nor the future, the Brāhmaṇa seeker is hungrily asking for instructions upon the nature of the ultimate Reality in us, the Self or the Ātman which is realisable as pure Awareness when we are neither rambling with our hopes and ambitions in the uncertain lands of the unborn time (the future) nor identifying ourselves with a team of ghostlike memories, recruited from the cremation ground of dead moments, months and years which constitute our past.

We become aware of the eternal Awareness in us to be ourselves only when we cut away our meaningless chains with the past and stop our dangerous flirtations with the unborn future, through the cobwebs of silly hopes, ambitions and desires. In short, the contents of an immediate moment is eternity or immortality. To capture a moment without the shackles borrowed from the past or the future, and thus to become fully aware of the moment, in itself and as such, is

the culmination of the pilgrimage of a sādhaka. This is called samādhi and the experience gained therein is the experience of Truth.

Naciketā, now it is clear, must have spent many days and nights pondering constantly upon the happenings about and around him, as well as those within him. The all witnessing presence of divinity, the prompter, the controller and the regulator of our memories and yearnings, in short, the recogniser of the future and the past, the Ātman in us, is the theme indicated by the question.

Supremely self-confident of his own perfect book knowledge (śāstra-jñāna), Naciketā is carefully warning Lord Death not to repeat what the śāstras have already stated or what he has already heard from his own Guru, but to expound upon that which Lord Death is 'seeing' (yat tat paśyasi). It means, on the whole, that Lord Death is to discourse upon his own subjective experience of Truth.



सर्वे वेदा यत्पदमामनन्ति
तपांसि सर्वाणि च यद्वदन्ति ।
यदिच्छन्तो ब्रह्मचर्यं चरन्ति
तत्ते पदं संग्रहेण ब्रवीम्योमित्येतत् ॥ १५ ॥

*sarve vedā yat-padamāmananti
tapāṁsi sarvāṇi ca yad-vadanti,
yadicchanto brahmacaryaṁ caranti
tatte padaṁ saṅgrahena bravīmyomityetat. (15)*

सर्वे – all; वेदाः – Vedas; यत् – which; पदम् – the goal; आमनन्ति – proclaim; तपांसि – act of penance; सर्वाणि – all; च – also; यत् – which; वदन्ति – declare; यत् – which; इच्छन्तः – wishing for; ब्रह्मचर्यं – life of brahmacārin (self-controlled life devoted to knowledge and austerity); चरन्ति – lead; तत् – that; ते – your; पदं – goal; संग्रहेण – briefly; ब्रवीमि – I tell; ओम् (ॐ) – Om; इति – thus; एतत् – it is

15. Yama said, “The goal (word) which all the Vedas declare of (praise), which all penances proclaim, and wishing for which they lead the life of brahmacārin, that goal (word) I will briefly tell thee. It is Om.”

Here the preceptor with this stanza starts his famous discourse which is the very core of this Upaniṣad. To begin with, Lord Death, in brief, summarises all that he has to say upon that which is beyond dharma and adharma, which is other than the cause and effect, and which is something different from the past and the future. Upaniṣad itself conforms to a style wherein a redundant alphabet is considered to be colossal sin and, in such a brief literature noted for superhuman brevity, for maintaining which, at places, even language has been sometimes sacrificed, we are surely heading to some insurmountable difficulty when Lord Death himself warns us that he is going to be deliberately ‘brief’.

The word ‘padam’, though it looks so small, has an accepted volume of meaning over which even a textbook can be written. There are something like twenty-two meanings for this two lettered innocent looking word such as – way, place, abode, state, footstep, footprints, sign, word, a goal and so on.

‘All the Vedas’, meaning, all the Upaniṣads though they argue differently, point out to the same goal of Truth. The 108 Upaniṣads may be considered as so many arrow marks along the circumference of the same circle, all of them pointing out to the same centre. Just as, in such a case, geometrically no two arrows on the circumference can be parallel, so too, no two approaches belonging to two different Upaniṣads run parallel; and yet, all of them, when produced, meet at one and the same point, the centre, the Truth. Thus “The goal that is pointed out by all the Upaniṣads,” says Lord Death, “is the factor that you are asking me now and that factor is, in brief, indicated by the pregnant symbol Om.”

All tapascaryā (all severe and conscious practices of self-control) are pursued and long years of studies are undertaken by living with a Teacher, a life of service, surrender and devotion, by seekers, only to realise this Truth (which you are asking for) which, in brief, is indicated by the symbol ‘Om’.

A close echo of this immortal stanza is heard in *Śrīmad Bhagavad-gītā*¹ and it is also noteworthy that in the *Gītā* we have the second half of this mantra repeated substantially.

The Reality is hinted at by the significance of the symbol ‘Om’; but thereby we shall not say that Om defines Truth, for to define Truth is to defile it. In the technique of self perfection, as conceived by the ṛṣis of the Upaniṣads, the symbol ‘Om’ is at once a formula indicating the goal and a

¹ *yadicchanto brahmacaryāṁ caranti
tatte padam saṅgrahaṇa pravakṣye. – Gītā-8.11*

pratika (an idol of Brahman) for purposes of worship and saguṇa (with form) meditation.



एतद्धयेवाक्षरं ब्रह्म एतद्धयेवाक्षरं परम् ।
एतद्धयेवाक्षरं ज्ञात्वा यो यदिच्छति तस्य तत् ॥ १६ ॥

*etaddhyevākṣaraṁ brahma etaddhyevākṣaraṁ param,
etaddhyevākṣaraṁ jñātvā yo yadicchati tasya tat. (16)*

एतत् – this; हि – indeed; एव – alone; अक्षरं – immortal; ब्रह्म – Brahman; एतत् – this; हि – indeed; एव – verily; अक्षरं – immortal; परम् – the Highest; एतत् – this; हि – also; एव – verily; अक्षरं – immortal; ज्ञात्वा – having known; यः – who; यत् – which; इच्छति – desires; तस्य – to him; तत् – that is (achieved)

16. *This word is verily Brahman alone, this word is verily the Highest, he who knows this word obtains verily, whatever (of the two)*¹ *he desires.*

Just as we found in the previous stanza that the word ‘padam’ has twenty-two meanings, here is yet another word ‘akṣara’ which has something like fourteen different meanings. Hence, the very language is called, in its pregnancy of suggestion and free scope of import in each word, as ‘the cultured’ – the Sanskrit or the saṁskārta. This is a language which the Āryans, probably by generations of effort and experimentation, evolved for the purpose of explaining to us

¹ Here ‘Brahman’ means lower or Saguṇa Brahman and the higher means Nirguṇa Brahman.

through its greater wealth of suggestions and suggestiveness, the inexplicable absolute Reality. To serve the purposes of the spirit of the age, everywhere we find new words coined by each generation. Similarly, in the era of deep meditation and seeking of the Self, they too had to evolve a new vocabulary and a language fit to serve their purposes. In fact, through no other language can we so effectively convey the science of the Self and the nature of the Reality as through Sanskrit.

In the stanza under discussion, Lord Death is explaining the worship of the very symbol Om. We have already stated that Om, besides indicating the supreme goal through its significance, also provides the meditator with a symbol or form of the supreme Reality. Om is used in the earliest time in Veda as a psalm 'Yes, so be it' meaning just as the 'Amen' of the Hebrews. Later this Amen was converted by St. John as the name of the Lord, 'The Amen, the faithful and true Witness'. Similarly, did Om slowly grow in its prominence, is a European theory not acceptable to those who have tested its vibrational effects and divine nature. We have also seen earlier how in the technique of the Upaniṣads, selfless worships and sacrifices in themselves constitute the most effective way of raising the inner purity and consequently the intellectual potency of an aspirant. Here, in this mantra we have an unequivocal declaration that the very formula Om is Reality, just as the very Śivaliṅga is to a devotee, the very Śivatattva or as we have in our world, the very crown, even when it is without the bald head of any king, is a symbol of might and royalty. Those who doubt this fact would do well to experiment upon a piece of the India's tri-colour in the streets of any marketplace cursing and stamping it under

their feet! If they are not mobbed by a patriotic crowd, it would be because the insulting action was, perhaps, enacted too late in the night!

A Vedāntin is not, as is generally believed by the fashioned crowd, a blasphemer of religion or a iconoclast. That he is not an idol breaker is clear from the very fact that in his very Bible, the Upaniṣads, we are now reading the worship of a symbol advised and advocated by the all-knowing, godly, ṛṣis themselves! If at all there is in India any sect that today dances to the mad tunes of some imaginary fanaticism and goes about condemning idol worship, they are doing a great injustice to themselves and to the very science of self perfection. As individuals, the erring ones may be ignored; in our understanding, they are victims of their own ignorance of our great Śrutis. But as regards the sect, it shall deserve among the intelligent and the educated as much respect as the social criminals deserve. Beware of them! Shun them! Avoid them!!

The ‘Om’ symbol is not only an idol, representing the absolute Reality but it also represents the relative Reality. The worshipper or the meditator can meditate upon it as the Supreme or as the relative. And through deep and long meditation when the meditator comes to discover a personal identity with the very thing the symbol stands for, that is, when he realises his identity with the symbol, he gains the realm of his identification. If the meditator has become one with the meditated and if, to him, the symbol is a representation of the apara Brahman (Hiranyagarbha), or the total mind, he gains that state of existence available in Brahma-loka. If on the other hand, the symbol represents, for

the successful meditator the supreme Reality, he comes to gain, in stages, a greater inner purification, a deeper power of concentration, and through long ponderings upon the nature of the Self, he gains in the end an identity that 'ayam aham asmi,' meaning, 'This I am'.

Obtains verily whatever he desires – In this statement Lord Death is indicating Truth now accepted as a verified fact supported by observed happening in life in the world of modern psychology. 'As you think so you become'. when the thinking comes to gain the necessary potency. In fact we have only to wish or desire, and our desire or wish must come true!

You may wonder whether the Swami has now gone slightly off his head, since it must be your experience in life that almost none of your desires has ever come true! Friends, he has not yet gone mad nor is the Śruti a mere textbook of mad ravings of a generation of lunatics. Since the Śruti cannot go wrong, this sādhu, who is only trying to unfold the significances in these mantras, cannot also be wrong. Again, just because there is a Śruti declaration, 'fire is cold' we shall not handle fire carelessly or put a few glowing coal pieces tied in a kerchief on our head and eyes on a summer afternoon. If personal experience is seemingly against the Śruti word, certainly the Śruti text must be taken to mean and hint at some significance deeper than the obvious word meaning.

Why is it then, that none of our desires comes to be true? Let us analyse ourselves.

We are under a delusory idea that thought is an idle, impotent happening, merely within ourselves. In this

misconception is the very seed of our saṃsārika limitation and sorrows. Thought has godly powers. As each thought sweeps across the mind, its secret potency rises up in front of us as an agent willing and ready to manifest that thought as a reality around us. This is something like the mysterious genie in '*Alāddin and the wonderful lamp*'. Aladdin had merely to rub the lamp and out came the genie who saluted his master, a ready slave to execute any wish the master might express; and we know that nothing was impossible for the lamp's genie. A thousandfold more powerful magnanimous and adorable is the genie of the mind that rises in us, a ready and willing slave, to execute our thought commands.

And yet, friends, you are still asking the same old question with your eyes, 'But Swami aren't you mad? You are talking just the opposite of what we are experiencing, although the genie idea is, we admit, quite an entertaining idea of hope.'

May be, we may yet discover the cause of our failures, if we are actually failing. As we said before, the adorable spirit of thought, the genie of the mind, rises up in front of us as it were, with each desire that whistles through our mental plane! With the ending of the thought, the genie, with faithful anxiety and sincerity turns upon his heels to sail forth to execute the order given by man's conscious mind. But alas! Ere the spirit could take the first step to rush out on his errand, another thought wave of desire has risen up in the inner world calling the genie back to take more orders; and at the command of the mind, it revolves round its heels again to face its master.

Sad indeed is the plight of this godly agent, the presiding deity of the human mind! This creature of all might, and all power is made, under our own confusing commands and contradictory orders, to stand and whirl like a top, each half of the circle representing a definite command given and the other half showing a definite but vain attempt made by the spirit at its execution! But the desire power does not allow it any chance at all to fulfil itself!

A mind tossed by contending thoughts or a mind plagued by an eruption of pox-like desires is the mind that is weeping over its own impotency! If a single pointed mind can wish for anything to the exclusion of any of her contending thoughts or desires, it shall at once be fulfilled.

Yoga viewed in this sense is a technique of controlling, conserving, preserving and directing the mental dynamism through a chosen channel of application. One who is well versed in this technique and has, therefore, a complete control over his mind is a God upon earth whose wishes become, as they cross his mind, accomplished facts. It is because of our own mad thinking that we are exhausting in vain all our godly potencies within.

If you start from your home to the office and on your way allow yourself to be a slave to your own indecisions and thus start walking forward (as the thought of duty calls you officewards) and backward (when the thoughts of the joys of idle sleep pass through your mind) then, even late at night you shall still be walking, having reached neither the office nor the home! The only way to reach the office is to maintain the desire to reach the office constantly in the

mind and physically working up to it, ignoring, and thus controlling, all other dissimilar thought waves.

So too in the accomplishments of our desires. And in fact, all of us shall find that to a large extent what we are today is the product of or a fulfilment of our own desires which have gained the required maturity and potency in us.

If you are only a typist you have only desired with sufficient potency to become only a successful typist. If you can desire yourself to become the President of this country with the required consistency of purpose and sincerity of devotion, and maintaining this idea can faithfully work up to it without any contradictory desires reaching your mind to dissipate the mental energies, the mind's genie shall carry you ultimately in a flying carpet, and in Delhi, you shall sit in that august chair – and perhaps regret its pinpricks!

We have indulged in rather too long a discussion; but if thereby the pessimistic crowd of suicides who form the majority of our sad, desperate, and degraded generation could regain for themselves a little more of self-confidence and the awareness of their own potencies, that lie uncultivated and unclaimed within, this sādhu feels that he will be justified in this necessary and deliberate digression.

Thus, if a meditator meditates upon Om, with a desire to enjoy the subtler joys of Brahma-loka, he gains that plane of Consciousness; and if the meditator with single pointed devotion meditates upon Om in a Naciketā-like spirit of seeking the Ultimate and the Immortal, he shall certainly become 'That'.



एतदालम्बनं श्रेष्ठमेतदालम्बनं परम् ।
एतदालम्बनं ज्ञात्वा ब्रह्मलोके महीयते ॥ १७ ॥

*etadāmbanaṁ śreṣṭham-etadāmbanaṁ param ,
etadāmbanaṁ jñātvā brahmaloke mahīyate. (17)*

एतत् – this; आलम्बनं – support; श्रेष्ठम् – glorious; एतत् – this;
आलम्बनं – support; परम् – supreme; एतत् – this; आलम्बनं –
support; ज्ञात्वा – having known; ब्रह्मलोके – in the world of
Brahmā – the Creator; महीयते – revel

*17. Most glorious is this support, this is the supreme support. He
who has realised (known) this support comes to revel in the world
of Brahmā – the Creator.*

‘jñānenaiva tu kaivalyam’ (by knowledge alone is Liberation),
is the fundamental siddhānta of all Vedāntins. However
severely we may beat the serpent in rope all through the
night, we can never kill it! But when beam of light is thrown
on the rope and thereby we gain the knowledge of the rope,
the serpent shall end instantaneously. Similarly, by the
subjective experience of the Knowledge Absolute alone can
we become the Eternal and thus reach the peak of perfection
and the end of all successes.

But here the Upaniṣad is advising, for the benefit of the
less evolved ones, a discipline of upāsanā or worship. And
it is a clear declaration of the Śruti in this stanza that the
successful worshipper reaches the Brahma-loka, the state of
Hiraṇyagarbha, which, of course, is not the highest.

In Sanskrit Brahma-loka can be milked to yield two meanings as Brahma-rūpī-loka (a world of the nature of the Self) or as Brahmani-loka (the world of the glorious Brahmā, the Creator). The worshipper (upāsaka), through his actions (karma), ensures only his entry into the world of the Creator, while the one who meditates upon the significances suggested by the symbol 'Om', knowing or realising his own personal identity with that Truth, through this Knowledge (jñāna), becomes the Absolute Himself. Thus in this stanza we may discover that Lord Death has hinted at the goal of both karma (worship) and jñāna (Knowledge).



न जायते म्रियते वा विपश्चित्-
 न्नायं कुतश्चित् बभूव कश्चित् ।
 अजो नित्यः शाश्वतोऽयं पुराणो
 न हन्यते हन्यमाने शरीरे ॥ १८ ॥

*na jāyate mriyate vā vipaścit-
 nnāyaṁ kutaścinna babhūva kaścit,
 ajo nityaḥ śāśvato'yaṁ purāṇo
 na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre. (18)*

न – not; जायते – is born; म्रियते – dies; वा – or; विपश्चित् – the intelligent Self (the all-knowing soul); न – not; अयं – this (the Ātman); कुतश्चित् – from anything elsewhere; न – not; बभूव – came into being; कश्चित् – anything; अजः – unborn; नित्यः – eternal; शाश्वतः – everlasting; अयं – this (Ātman); पुराणः – the ancient; न – not; हन्यते – slain; हन्यमाने – being slain; शरीरे – the body

18. *The intelligent Ātman is not born, nor does He die. He did not spring from anything, and nothing sprang from Him. Unborn, eternal, everlasting, ancient, He is not slain although the body is slain.*

Earlier in our discussions we emphasised how the *Kaṭhopaniṣad* mantras were evidently an immediate inspiration to Bhagavān Vyāsa to crystallise his matured thinking and full realisation of the Truth in his own Upaniṣad-poem, *Śrīmad Bhagavad-gītā*. You all know how in the *Gītā* the entire first chapter and portions of the second are spent in providing an inimitable background, similar to the story of Naciketā in this Upaniṣad, wherein to the presence of an immortal Teacher, Lord Kṛṣṇa, a disciple, Śrī Arjuna, is brought in an attitude of surrender, devotion and seeking. And in the second chapter of the divine song¹ sung by the Lord Himself, there is a substantial reproduction of even the very words of the mantra that is now under discussion – (the last line of this mantra is repeated as such).

You must all remember that the pointed question of Naciketā was to explain to him that which Lord Death had experienced himself personally, that eternal factor which is beyond virtue and vice, which is other than cause and effect and which is other than past or future. During our discussions of the stanza, we clearly found that the aspiring Brāhmaṇa boy was enquiring after the nature of the ever witnessing spark of Awareness, the Ātman in the body. Lord Death, in answering him, we also found, had first dealt with the symbol of Truth, Om. Now in this stanza, the Teacher is directly

¹ *ajo nityaḥ śāśvato'yaṁ purāṇo-
na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre. – Bhagavad-gītā-2.20*

hinting at the divine Spark that presides over the matter envelopments constituting our body, mind and intellect.

Ātman is not born nor does It die – All perishable, finite things undergo modifications and the entire set of modifications are classified under five headings, namely, birth, growth, disease, decay and death. In this stanza, we are told that the Truth Principle gracing our within is without the first and the last of these pentamorous modifications, namely, the birth and the death. Naturally, they mean to incorporate within themselves all the other unsaid three modifications also. That which undergoes modifications is a perishable finite quantity; in denying modification the Teacher is hinting at the eternal nature of the soul of man.

We must note here that the word ‘vipāścīt’ is used for Ātman and it is no accidental usage or exaggerated meaning. It comes from the root ‘vip’ – to quiver or tremble; hence its adjective vip – inspired; its noun vipas – inspiration; so vipāścīt – knowing inspiration – born of the experience of the pure Knowledge.

The soul is unborn; only the body is born. You must be remembering our preliminary talks when we discussed exhaustively these points in general. And yet, to help you at your recapitulation we may add here the following –

The potter makes a pot. The pot is born. But the space in the pot being itself eternally one with the outer space is not created or born. The pot may break. That which is made is perishable. But with the breaking of the pot, the pot space is not broken. The unborn pot space knows no death.

Similarly, the Self or the Truth is never born and naturally never dies. The false ego-centre, through vulgar meditations and ignorant thinking, has moulded out a perishable body-mind-intellect equipment in which the all-pervading, eternal Truth seems to be confined. The body equipment might perish, but not the Truth Principle.

And again, the potter did not make a pot and then pour 'some space' into the pot; the potter worked in space and as he moulded the pot he could mould it only with space already inside.

Similarly, the body is born in Ātman, with Ātman, and this Truth Principle is ever the presiding deity within and without the body during its birth, growth, decay, disease and death.

With the above ideas in mind the second line of the mantra must now stand out as self-explanatory.



हन्ता चेन्मन्यते हन्तुं हतश्चेन्मन्यते हतम् ।
उभौ तौ न विजानीतो नायं हन्ति न हन्यते ॥ १९ ॥

*hantā cenmanyate hantuṁ-hataścenmanyate hatam,
ubhau tau na vijānīto nāyaṁ-hanti na hanyate. (19)*

हन्ता – the slayer; चेत् – if; मन्यते – thinks; हन्तुं – that he slays;
हतः – the slain; चेत् – if; मन्यते – thinks; हतम् – killed; उभौ – both;
तौ – they (two); न – not; विजानीतः – know well; न अयं – This
does not; हन्ति – slay; न – not; हन्यते – is slain

19. *If the slayer thinks 'I slay', and if the slain thinks, 'I am slain', then both of them do not know well. This slays not nor is This slain.*

In the *Gītā*¹, we notice that the above mantra especially its second line is repeated in developing a parallel thought which amounts to almost an actual borrowing.

If a murderer feels that by wounding the body, the Ātman is killed or if the murdered comes to despair on his deathbed that his Ātman is dying, both of them are under a delusory conception that the body is the soul. The stupidity of such thinking becomes more poignantly apparent to us if we were to say that we have broken the space in the cup when we throw the cup down!!

This mantra reveals itself its meaning to anyone who has carefully followed our discussions upon the previous mantras.



अणोरणीयान्महतो महीया-
नात्मास्य जन्तोर्निहितो गुहायाम् ।
तमक्रतुः पश्यति वीतशोको
धातुप्रसादान्महिमानमात्मनः ॥ २० ॥

*aṇoraṇīyān-mahato mahīyā-
nātmāsyā jantornihito guhāyām,
tamakratuḥ paśyati vītaśoko
dhātu-prasādānmahimānamātmanaḥ. (20)*

¹ *ubhau tau na vijānīto nāyaṁ hanti na hanyate – Gītā-2.19*

अणोः – of the subtlest; अणीयान् – subtler; महतः – than the greatest; महीयान् – greater (bigger); आत्मा – the Ātman; अस्य – its; जन्तोः – of the living beings; निहितः – is seated; गुहायाम् – in the cavity of heart; तम् – that; अक्रतुः – desireless; पश्यति – realises; वीतशोकः – free from sorrow; धातुः – of the senses and mind; प्रसादात् – grace (through purity and tranquillity); महिमानम् – majesty; आत्मनः – of the Self

20. The Ātman subtler than the subtlest, and greater than the greatest, is seated in the cavity of heart of each living being. He who is free from desires, with his mind and senses composed, beholds the majesty of the Self and becomes free from sorrow.

This is one of the much quoted stanzas, a favourite one with all preachers and philosophies. In its charming style of brevity, the mantra hints at a treasure of suggestions, indicating almost directly the Ātman, which is the goal of all seekers.

By defining the Ātman as the smallest of the small, a mere dull intellect might understand that the Ātman is not yet seen or discovered because the scientific world has not yet constructed a sufficiently powerful microscope! But to a philosophical mind, cultured in the ways of the śāstras, the statement is an ample explanation of the most subtle nature of the Ātma-tattva. Had Śruti ended her definition with the above statement alone it would have denied the volume and girth of things and beings and their connection with Truth. This probable misunderstanding is negated by the additional epithet that the Ātman is also 'greater than the greatest'. Here the 'great' is meant to cover the entire

universe of manifested existence; and Truth, according to the Śruti, not only pervades, envelops and penetrates through and through the jagat, but also extends farther than the crores of universes that whirl around in space! This is endorsed by a similar statement in the *Gītā*, made by the Lord Himself, wherein he says, ‘The jagat formed of the entire manifested worlds spreads itself out in their delusions and disturbances, are, O Arjuna! only a fraction of my real nature.’¹ This means that the remaining vast portion of Truth is yet in its pure nature, untouched by the play of duality created by the mysterious jugglery of the mind, called ‘māyā’.

Truth is described here as both the tiniest of the tiny and also wider than the widest. This means that pure Consciousness is an eternal, all-pervading essence, and that even the minutest space conceivable is pervaded by this great Divine influence. And after these statements, when a Western student reads the description that it is lodged in the heart of all living beings he becomes baffled, and hence his cry – *Kaṭhapaniṣad* is a compilation of floating ślokas that had worn out in their usage even at the time of their compilation!!

These are but some false evidences to prove anything of this sort about this Upaniṣad. To say that *Kaṭhapaniṣad* is a compilation is to tell a lie. Truth is here expressed as ‘residing in the heart’ only to indicate the point where the individual, through meditation, ultimately comes to realise it.

¹ *athavā bahunaitena kim jñātena tavārjuna,
viṣṭabhyāham-idaṁ kṛṣṇam-ekāṁśena sthito jagat.* – *Gītā*-10.42

The sādhanā of hearing and reflecting according to Vedānta culminates in its final fulfilment only through the godly vocation to which man alone is heir to, namely, meditation. Meditation is the process by which man can rise above, from his subjective bondages¹ and come to the state of freedom and joy of God. And this process by which we can realise the ideal of Perfection, eternal Bliss, indicated by the previous epithet, is hinted at this stanza.

He who is free from desires – In using this qualification to the seeker who is noted for success, a lot has been said by Śruti with her suggestive style used in the Upaniṣads. Akratu has been rendered as ‘desireless’ by Śaṅkarācārya; here it does not mean the impotency born out of an indolence misunderstood as vairāgya and a complete inaction and the consequent morbidity glorified in vain as viveka by the misled Hindus. Śaṅkarācārya clearly points out that it is a natural freedom from desires for external sense objects, which dissipate the energies of the seeker and makes him unfit for the true life’s Realisation.

Even the desire for the Supreme may as an anxiety destroy the peace and poise of the personality. In the last stage even this anxiety is renounced when the individual rests in the supreme – as the supreme will. Thus by ‘akratu’ the means as well as the goal indicated.

Indeed, the Āryan personality is not satisfied with a mere ideology, however great it may be, if it is not advocated along with a practical system of methods by which one can

² the knots of the heart – Ignorance (avidyā), desire (kāma) and work (karma).

realise and live that ideology. Free from desires, if one, through long and arduous practices, gains control over one's sense organs and mind, that sacred one shall come to experience the self-effulgent, eternal, Self. Therefore, in this realisation of his true identity as the Ātman, he goes beyond the destinies of sorrow and pain, because they are the destinies of the body and the mind only. 'As Ātman, I am not the body or the mind-intellect instrument;' the fatigue of the car is not the fatigue of the owner riding in it and owner knows fully well that he is not his car.

With a view to entertaining you all, the Swami may invite you here to a short ramble into the woods of the endless quarrels between non-dualism and dualism. Both of them exist on the authority of the Śrutis. Here in the stanza under discussion, we have the phrase 'dhātu-prasādāt' which is interpreted by the dualists as to mean Lord's grace (dhātṛprasādāt) where 'dhātṛ' means the supporter, namely, the Creator of the universe, which is of course the God Principle. Hence, the dualists claim that this Ātmatattva can be realised only when the seeker gets the grace and the blessings of the dhātṛ.

The same epithet is interpreted by the advaitins as to mean 'dhātuḥ samprasādāt', meaning, 'by the purification of the senses and the mind' (dhātu – element). To the non-dualists the outer world of sense objects has an existence only in relation to their corresponding sense organs and the synchronising machine of a mind behind them all.

Thus, the same word is explained in two different ways by the two schools of philosophical thinking. Both

when viewed independently, or approached intellectually, would seem to overpower us with the strength of their individual arguments and the efficiency of their irresistible logic. Naturally, the lesser folks who have studied these great Masters only partially grow fanatical and fight among themselves in support of their beliefs as though they were annointed for that purpose! But to a true seeker who is walking the path and is trying industriously to live the Life Divine, the seeming contradictions in the philosophies of Madhvācārya, Rāmānujācārya and Śaṅkarācārya wither away into a perfect understanding of the different standpoints from which each of them is talking to us.

The difficulty arises when the commentators try to discover in the Upaniṣads scriptural sanction for their pet 'Doctrine of Grace'. The Vedas accept the Doctrine of 'devatā prīti' – the joy of the Gods at the proper rituals when a true performer invokes the Gods properly. Parallel to this, there is no grace of Ātman to descend upon something other than Itself. Hence, Śaṅkarācārya is indeed well justified in clearly making it dhātu prasādāt; by the purity of the subtle elements in the seeker like, the purified intellect and the single pointed mind. Tranquillity is the atmosphere of grace required for the blessed self-communion to take place.

The sum total of the efforts put into any piece of work slowly rises in its potency until at last when it equates with quantity of power and dynamism required, the work gets accomplished in a glorious success. So too, in the various efforts put in by a seeker in perfecting himself, these practices add on their share to the total pool until at last the cumulative

effect of all the practices becomes a divine power by the blessing of which the final achievement is gained. To us pure Vedāntins, living the principles of Vedānta, there can never be any school that opposes us; for, Vedāntins, wisdom can bring its light into any problem and resolve it in terms of the eternal Truth.



आसीनो दूरं व्रजति शयानो याति सर्वतः ।
कस्तं मदामदं देवं मदन्यो ज्ञातुमर्हति ॥ २१ ॥

*āsīno dūraṁ vrajati śayāno yāti sarvataḥ;
kastaṁ madāmadam devaṁ madanyo jñātum-arhati. (21)*

आसीनः – sitting; दूरं – far; व्रजति – goes; शयानः – lying down; याति – goes; सर्वतः – everywhere; कः – who; तं – that, Him; मदामदं – who rejoices and rejoices not; देवं – the God; मदन्यः – other than myself; ज्ञातुम् – to know; अर्हति – is able

21. Sitting he goes far; lying he goes everywhere, who else, therefore, save myself is able to comprehend the God, who rejoices and rejoices not?

The indescribable Ātma-tattva, when forced to confine Itself to the limited meanings of a finite language, the phrases and sentences employed must get blasted out into a jig-saw puzzle-like confusing contrariness! It is only the fittest student, who has the necessary head and heart, that can, through the trellis of the words, peep beyond and actually discover the beauty and the Truth that lies beyond; and this becomes fully successful only

when the student gets a chance to listen to discourses upon the Śruti mantras from a fit Master.

Sitting he goes far – Pure Consciousness that seems to preside over faculties in the body is conceived of here as the Ātman sitting. But the moment a mental wave vitalised by this Truth in us flies from here to Europe to contemplate upon the sunny land of Italy, it seems to meet therein Existence or Consciousness already present there. In this sense, the Ātman is said to be making travels far into distances though in fact, the Absolute, all-pervading Truth cannot and will not move.

When we say that we are going to the next room it is a clear indication that we are leaving the spot where we are now and travelling towards a point where now we are not, and where we shall be in time. This movement is possible only when the thing is a limited entity. When it is an all-pervading Truth, it actually cannot go anywhere, since there is no spot where it is not already. For example, my right hand cannot move into my right hand, since my right hand is all-pervading in my right hand. No two substances can occupy one and the same place during the same period of time is a scientific fact known, applauded and appreciated by the modern world. Thus, Ātman or the Life Centre is a motionless entity, but seems to be moving only when it is conditioned by the mind and functioning as its manifestations, as thought waves!

The same idea is repeated for purposes of emphasis and clarification in 'Lying he goes everywhere'¹.

¹ Compare these descriptions with those from in *Īśāvāsya-upaniṣad*- 4&5

The second line of the mantra seems to be a quotation from an arrogant monster of incorrigible vanity and egoism, at the peak of an evening's discourse wherein the listeners were patient enough to encourage his vanity by applauses! 'Who else, therefore, save me is able to comprehend the God' – Friends, no such egoism is meant here. If Lord Death were so egoistic He would not have been the Master of Knowledge and Self-realisation as He was; and naturally, not a Guru fit for Śruti to bring into her palace as a tutor for her beloved son, Naciketā.

The Master means to state that one who has gained sufficient control over his mind and intellect, through a sincere discipline of self-control alone can, through the higher meditations on the nature of Truth, reach the cumulative glory of subjectively experiencing the all-pervading Truth as described in the above pleasant language of contradictions. If the mind is not pure, the Truth realised shall not be the Absolute.

Like a mirror, Truth truly reflects the object in front of it. Mr. Das if he stands in front of his mirror in his bath-towel or in his office dress or in his bridal robe or even in any fancy dress he chooses to wear, the reflection in the mirror reflects faithfully the same Das in the particular form of dress he has worn. An impure intellect can experience only the sullied Truth!



अशरीरं शरीरेष्वनवस्थेष्ववस्थितम् ।
महान्तं विभुमात्मानं मत्वा धीरो न शोचति ॥ २२ ॥

*aśarīraṁ śarīreṣvanavastheṣvavasthitam,
mahāntaṁ vibhumātmānaṁ matvā dhīro na śocati. (22)*

अशरीरं – bodiless; शरीरेषु – in the bodies; अनवस्थेषु – perishable (impermanent); अवस्थितम् – seated; महान्तं – the great (Supreme); विभुम् – all-pervading; आत्मानं – Ātman; मत्वा – having realised; धीरः – the wise man; न – not; शोचति – grieves

22. The wise man, who knows the Ātman as bodiless, seated firmly in perishable bodies, great and all-pervading, does never grieve.

Our wrong understanding that we are the body-mind-intellect equipment and that there is no other greater Truth in us at all, is the gurgling source of all the pains and agonies, diseases and death, despairs and dejections, hopes and desires that befall us. When, in the maturity of discrimination, a man with an evolved intellect and mind, like that of Naciketā, comes to enquire and know, seek and discover for himself the Ātman within, such a saintly one, at the peak of evolution, dwelling in the realm of Perfection comes to identify himself permanently as that Truth Principle, and thereafter, naturally, he shall know no pain or limitation. This idea is explained here in this mantra.

All that man has to do to become God is to renounce totally his egocentric vanity and the satanic murmurings of his own impure mind of uncontrolled devilry!

Detached from the false, attach yourself to the Truth!
Therein lies the true redemption and all successes and
achievements.



नायमात्मा प्रवचनेन लभ्यो
न मेधया न बहुना श्रुतेन ।
यमेवैष वृणुते तेन लभ्य-
स्तस्यैष आत्मा विवृणुते तनूँस्वाम् ॥ २३ ॥

*nāyamātmā pravacanena labhyo
na medhayā na bahunā śrutena,
yamevaiṣa vṛṇute tena labhya-
stasyaiṣa ātmā vivṛṇute tanūṁ svām. (23)*

न – not; अयम् – this; आत्मा – Ātman; प्रवचनेन – by the study of
Vedās; लभ्यः – be attained; न मेधया – not by intelligence; न –
nor; बहुना – much; श्रुतेन – by hearing (learning); यम् – whom;
एव – alone; एषः – this (Ātman); वृणुते – chooses; तेन – by him;
लभ्यः – is attained; तस्य – his; एषः – this; आत्मा – Ātman; विवृणुते
– reveals; तनूँ – true nature (real form); स्वाम् – its own

23. This Ātman cannot be attained by the study of Vedas nor
by intelligence, nor by much hearing. It is gained by him who
chooses (prays to) this (Ātman) alone. To him this Ātman reveals
Its true nature.¹

¹ *nāyamātmā pravacanena labhyo
na medhayā na bahunā śrutena,
yamevaiṣa vṛṇute tena labhya-
stasyaiṣa ātmā vivṛṇute tanūṁ svām. – Muṇḍakopaniṣad-3.2.3*

Mere bookish knowledge is no knowledge at all. This is the uniform opinion of all the Śrutis known to us. An individual having a fair knowledge of the language technicalities of Sanskrit can discourse endlessly upon the word meanings of the Śruti texts which, in their style, adopt the simplest words that language can command. But Śruti denies to such professional 'temple-talkers' and men of noise and sound any actual blessing that can be gained from the real Knowledge, the subjective experience of this source of all dynamism – Ātman – and life in us.

There are some ignorant paṇḍitas who claim that Self-realisation can be only through an initial memorising of the sacred texts. 'Medhā' means the power of the intellect which specially manifests in its retentive capacity. There are some who can repeat from memory all the four Vedas and they are honoured as Caturvedis among paṇḍitas. There is a Malabar Brāhmaṇa, who is known to this sādhu, who can repeat from memory the entire *Bhāgavatam* text with Sṛīdhara cārya's commentary! Many are the Mahātmās who can recapitulate and sing all the mantras in the ten main Upaniṣads often with the texts of the *Śāṅkarabhāṣya*. Admirable though these achievements be in the material plane where we are ready to adore, admire and appreciate the powers of the intellect, the Śruti here pooh-poohs them as a sheer waste and filthy discharge! A mere memorising of the stanza or even cultivating a capacity to discourse upon the mantras shall not take any individual to the goal pointed out by the Śruti.

Again, there are some who place an undue importance on merely attending satsaṅgas. Such men are ready to

undergo any amount of botheration, undertake any long journey, and however often it needs be, only if they can be in a hall where some spiritual discourse is at full swing. And having reached the hall, many of them invariably discover a comfortable corner where, in the diffused light, they can gloriously retire and, leaning on a wall or pillar, can silently set their minds to race backwards towards their homes and friends! Bodily they sit in the satsaṅga but mentally and intellectually they are closed bottles ever revelling in their own poison contents!

This Swami is not exaggerating, there must be, at least, half a dozen here who have not heard what we have been just now roaring through this deafening microphone!

If neither study, nor memorising, nor satsaṅga can give us a subjective experience of the Reality, does it mean that Self-realisation is an impossibility? The Śruti mantra in its second half asserts that Realisation is possible; only, that we have to pursue the methods advocated by the ṛṣis with sincerity, faith and consistency. Hence Śruti says that the aspirant who seeks diligently the Ātman, to him the Ātman reveals Itself.

The root 'vr̥' means to choose, to cover. So 'vr̥ṇute' means chooses; and 'viv̥ṇute' means uncovers or reveals.

The seeking consists of the slow removal of all the negativities in our physical and psychological make-up, such as caste and class prejudices, vanities of being rich or pre-occupation with the tragedies of our poverty, the selfishness,

egoism, hatreds, jealousies, greeds, and lusts which in their aggregate constitute the barricade that keeps us away from the land of our own real nature. The details of this gruesome self-created mistake, by which we have come to sign our own self chosen exile, are hinted at in the following stanza –



नाविरतो दुश्चरितान्नाशान्तो नासमाहितः ।
नाशान्तमानसो वापि प्रज्ञानेनैवमाप्नुयात् ॥ २४ ॥

*nāvirato duścāritān-nāśānto nāsamāhitah,
nāśāntamānaso vāpi prajñānenainam-āpnuyāt. (24)*

न – not; अविरतः – not refrained, who has not turned away;
दुश्चरितात् – from bad conduct (wickedness); न – nor; अशान्तः – not
pacified; न – nor; असमाहितः – whose mind is not concentrated;
न – nor; अशान्तमानसः – whose mind is not tranquil; वा – or;
अपि – also; प्रज्ञानेन – by knowledge; एनम् – this (Ātman); आप्नुयात्
– can obtain

*24. But he who has not turned away from bad conduct, whose
senses are not subdued, whose mind is not concentrated, whose
mind is not pacified, can never obtain this Ātman by knowledge.*

This stanza is to be read along with the previous one, since it seems to be a continuation of the ideas expressed in the earlier one where the eternal peace and the joy of perfection that accrue with the darśana of the Ātman are denied to those who have merely learnt the texts by heart or to those

who can only give long discourses upon them or again to those who are religiously regular only in reaching the halls of such discourses!

Here Lord Death continues explaining the inner barricades that we, in our ignorance, have raised between ourselves and our own Self!

Self-realisation and the consequent joy of godhood are denied in this mantra to him –

- (a) who has not turned away from acts of adharma,
- (b) who has not brought his senses under control, whose mind has not, therefore, gained any capacity to concentrate and
- (c) who has not found in his mind a peace within itself, because of its thudding palpitations and anxieties regarding the fruits of its actions.

In this mantra we have all the necessary hints by which we can come to intensify our spiritual sādhanā. First of all, the sādhanika must retire from all his activities which are immoral and unethical. Unless one is well grown in his moral and ethical life, no amount of japa, or tapa, bell and flower, sandalwood and camphor, temples, churches and mosques can be of any help to him in his spiritual growth. The meaningless cry against the inefficiency of religion that we are now so accustomed to hear, is all raised, perhaps by sincere devotees themselves, who are fathers to some twelve children, who will tell any lie (if thereby they can gain even a quarter-anna-coin) and who can taste the sugar in their cup of milk better only when they have the added satisfaction of

scalding a few ants along with their spoons of sugar! Neither are they self-controlled, nor are they honest, nor non-violent; and our entire religion rests upon the triple-principles of brahmacarya, satyam and ahimsā.

When an individual has lived at least for a time respecting dharma, he has the necessary gate pass to the arena of spiritual practices. Then again, to gain the higher worlds of greater perfection, the aspirant should learn slowly the art of controlling his sense organs from their habits of revelling madly and gushing forth ceaselessly into the backwaters of sorrow breeding sense objects. By a pursuit of actions of dharma, an individual comes to limit his activities and when he gains a certain amount of control over his indriyas, the mind, of its own accord, grows in its potencies to concentrate and to apply itself with greater vigour and efficiency. Even at this stage, the seeker will not be fully fit for success if he has not disciplined himself to get completely detached from his mental anxieties for the enjoyment of the fruits of his tapaścaryā (self denials and such other methods of subduing the senses). About this Ranade says, 'Lord Death, in short, means that there are very few, indeed, who are such full-fledged and sincere seekers! At the same time a fit candidate for Vedānta path is not a fairy one who falls from the sky with morning dew and who, nestling for a while in the opening buds, falls down with the weight of his own sheer competency!! A fit student is pressed out between the diligent urgency felt and the sincerity of pursuit put in; and how rare are such press houses!'¹

¹ R.D. Ranade: 'A Constructive Survey of Upaniṣadic Philosophy'

It was with this idea in mind that Lord Death was compelled to cry earlier (in mantra 21) ‘Who else, therefore, save myself, is able to comprehend the God?’



यस्य ब्रह्म च क्षत्रं च उभे भवत ओदनः ।
मृत्युर्यस्योपसेचनं क इत्था वेद यत्र सः ॥ २५ ॥

इति काठकोपनिषदि प्रथमाध्याये द्वितीया वल्ली समाप्ता ॥

*yasya brahma ca kṣatram ca ubhe bhavata odanaḥ,
mr̥tyur-yasyopasecanam ka itthā veda yatra saḥ. (25)*

iti Kāṭhakopaniṣadi prathamādhyaṇye dvitīyā vallī samāptā.

यस्य – to whom; ब्रह्म – the Brāhmaṇa; च – and; क्षत्रं – the Kṣatriya; च – also; उभे – both; भवतः – are, because; ओदनः – food; मृत्युः – death; यस्यः – to whom; उपसेचनं – condiment (curry or pickle); कः – who; इत्था – thus; वेद – knows; यत्र – where; सः – he is

25. *To whom the Brāhmaṇa and the Kṣatriya classes are (as it were) but food and death itself is a condiment (curry or pickle), how can mortal ones thus know where that Ātman is!*

(Thus ends the second vallī of the first chapter)

The supreme Reality, which is the Self sought by the seekers is the presiding factor that makes possible the worlds of names and forms to exist and function.

Truth envelops all jagat. The inert and dead shadow can work themselves out only in a medium of pure Consciousness or pure Existence. The perceived worlds of names and forms can exist only in pure Existence. This idea is poetically hinted at in this mantra when it says that even the Brāhmaṇa and the Kṣatriya classes, which are considered to be the very best among men (and man is the very roof and crown of creation), are but mere food to be swallowed and digested with comfort and ease by the Supreme! In short all the manifested world is but a morsel for Him to be digested within a few moments! And to such a Supreme, even the threatening process of death is but a pickle that adds extra taste to Its appetite!

When such is the might and power of pure Consciousness in Its absolute nature, it is rather difficult for ordinary mortals to realise their identity as the Ātman, unless, of course, they are ready to undergo the earlier explained processes of self-purification and self-perfection.





SECTION 3 – तृतीया वल्ली

The parable of the chariot teaching the adhyātma-yoga –
yoking of the individual soul with the supreme Soul.

ऋतं पिबन्तौ सुकृतस्य लोके
गुहां प्रविष्टौ परमे परार्धे ।
छायातपौ ब्रह्मविदो वदन्ति
पञ्चाग्नयो ये च त्रिणाचिकेताः ॥ १ ॥

*ṛtaṁ pibantau sukr̥tasya loke
guhāṁ praviṣṭau parame parārdhe,
chāyātapau brahmavido vadanti
pañcāgnayo ye ca triṇāciketāḥ. (1)*

ऋतं – fruits; पिबन्तौ – (the two) enjoying; सुकृतस्य – of the good deeds; लोके – in the world; गुहां – in the cavity of the heart; प्रविष्टौ – (the two) being seated; परमे – Supreme; परार्धे – abode of Brahman; छायातपौ – like shadow and light; ब्रह्मविदः – the knowers of Brahman; वदन्ति – call them; पञ्चाग्नयो – the performers of the fivefold fire; ये च – as also; त्रिणाचिकेताः – those who have propitiated three times the Nāciketā fire

1. The two who enjoy the fruits of their good works being seated in the cavity of the heart, the seat of the Supreme, the knowers of Brahman call them shadow and light; as also the performers of

the fivefold-fire¹ and those who have propitiated three times the Nāciketā fire.

In this section, we have the famous and immortal metaphor of the chariot explaining the Ātman and the body. In the chariot sits the driver and the owner. In the body stays the Paramātman, the Self; and the jīvātman, the ego and the entire technique of the adhyātma-yoga is explained.

To introduce these two factors, the Ātmā (Self) and the jīva (ego), we have here, in the very opening stanza of this vallī, a declaration unanimously made by all the Realised Saints of Knowledge and endorsed by the faithful householder paṇḍitas. All of them declare that though the body seems to be controlled and directed by these two factors, one of them is but the shadow/replica of the other!!

The shadow or reflection has no independent existence of its own. It exists only with reference to the light or the illumined object.

Desire-prompted thoughts rise and fall in waves eternally in their own rhyme and rhythm in the mental lake of an uncultured animal man. This mad death dance of the rumbling thought waves, kicking about their pranks in front of the wisdom light in us naturally throws in front of the mind, a composite shadow form, ever trembling and changing.

The individual in his extrovertedness gazing on outwardly views this shadow and identifies himself with it.

¹ The five fires are – Gārhapatya, Āhavanīya, Dakṣiṇāgni, Sabhya and Āvasathya.

The shadow represents the 'I' – ego, the saṁsārin, who suffers the mortal agonies of his physical pains, mental tortures, intellectual failures, and spiritual bankruptcy! This shadow is called the 'jīvātman' and the light that causes it, the 'I' – ego, the God Principle in us, is called the 'Paramātman'.

ṛtam – As a noun, it is one of the most significant words in the Vedas and means a little more than mere 'righteousness'; it is something like 'divine law' that connects actions and their fruits.

The fruits of actions are enjoyed only by the individual soul (jīvātman), the 'I-ego'. Dual number is used here, instead of the singular; hence, the Śruti statement comes to indicate that both the supreme Soul and the individual soul are partners in enjoying the fruits of actions. This should not be understood in its literal word meaning, for Śruti would be thereby contradicting herself, her incessant declaration, often and always maintained, that the eternal, all full Ātman is neither a doer nor an enjoyer. He alone is the illuminator of all doings and enjoyments.

And yet, there is, in the mantra, the usage of the dual number when it says 'the two enjoy the fruits of their good deeds'. This difficulty is solved by Śrī Śaṅkarācārya in his commentary. He says that the shadow 'I-ego' has no existence at all without the presence of the Light Principle in the 'I-Ego' and so, they are coupled together in a general way. Examples of this type of coupling are also seen often in our day-to-day transactions in life. When a crowd of people are moving on and although there are some among them who have no

umbrellas (nor khadi caps), we in our general conversations indicate them all together collectively as the umbrella carriers (the Congressmen).

In a similar sense, because of the seeming coexistence of the jīvātman and the Paramātman, the ‘false-I’ and the ‘Real-I’, the delusory enjoyment of the fruits of actions, which is the lot of the jīvātman is coupled with the witnessing eternal light of Intelligence, the Paramātman. This is more clearly brought out in *Muṇḍakopaniṣad*.¹

Both of them are explained here to be seated in the cavity of the heart, where intelligence resides. This idea of the intelligence being in the heart-space has been repeated before so often, that we need not pause here any more to discuss it in detail.



यः सेतुरीजानानामक्षरं ब्रह्म यत्परम् ।
अभयं तितीर्षतां पारं नाचिकेतश्शकेमहि ॥ २ ॥

*yaḥ seturījānānām-akṣaram brahma yat-param,
abhayaṁ titīrṣatām pāraṁ nāciketaśśakemahi. (2)*

यः – which; सेतुः – bridge; ईजानानाम् – for those who perform sacrifices; अक्षरं – immortal; ब्रह्म – Brahman; यत् – which is परम् – the highest Supreme; अभयं – fearless; तितीर्षतां – for

¹ *dvā suparṇā sayujā sakhāyā samānaṁ vṛkṣaṁ pariśasvajāte,
tayoranyāḥ pippalaṁ svādvattya-naśnannanyo abhicākaśīti.*

– *Muṇḍakopaniṣad*-3.1.1

those who wish to cross (the ocean of saṁsāra); पारं – the other shore; नाचिकेतं – that Nāciketā fire (sacrifice); शकेमहि – we may master

2. May we master that Nāciketā fire-sacrifice which is the bridge for those who perform sacrifices, and also which is the highest immortal Brahman, fearless and the other shore for those who wish to cross the ocean of saṁsāra.

These two opening stanzas of this section seem to be later interpolations as they individually explain two different themes and in themselves do not seem to possess any direct connection with the discussions that are yet to follow in this chapter. However, there is a connection between these two and what is to follow, inasmuch as the Upaniṣads, though a product of a revolt against the ritualistic karma-portion of the Vedas, they rise from and have an intimate relation with it.

setu (bridge or refuge) – The ‘Nāciketā fire’, that was discussed before, is described here as a bridge that connects this mortal world of ours with the shores of that immortal life in the heavens. This stanza seems to glorify both the goals of karma (worship) and jñāna (Knowledge). The first part of the mantra asserts that this sacred fire, if performed with sincerity, faith and devotion as prescribed earlier, can lead the egocentric soul to that realm of Consciousness called the heaven; and the duration of existence in embodiment there being longer than life upon this globe, in a relative sense, it is indeed an immortal life.

In the second part of the mantra, there is glorification of the goal reached by a jñānī through his meditation upon the nature of the soul and its relationship with the total soul.



आत्मानं रथिनं विद्धि शरीरं रथमेव तु ।
बुद्धिं तु सारथिं विद्धि मनः प्रग्रहमेव च ॥ ३ ॥

*ātmānaṁ rathinaṁ viddhi śarīraṁ rathameva tu,
buddhiṁ tu sārathiṁ viddhi manaḥ pragrahameva ca. (3)*

आत्मानं – the ātman (jīva); रथिनं – Lord of the chariot (who sits within it); विद्धि – know; शरीरं – the body; रथम् – the chariot; एव – verily; तु – again; बुद्धिं – the intellect; तु – again; सारथिं – the charioteer; विद्धि – know; मनः – the mind; प्रग्रहम् – the reins; एव – verily; च – and

3. Know the Ātman as the Lord of the chariot, who sits within it and the body as the chariot. Know the intellect as the charioteer and the mind as, verily, the reins.

With this stanza we begin the discussion of an analogy, famous in the Hindu philosophical literature, often quoted by authors and orators. Herein we may detect also the exact point in this famous Upaniṣad which probably gave all the fiery inspiration necessary for Bhagavān Śrī Veda-vyāsa to write his famous Upaniṣad-poem, the *Gītā*.

The analogy of the chariot is, as such, most picturesquely depicted in the divine song, the *Gītā*. Therein we have the picture of a chariot led by the five surging horses with Lord

Kṛṣṇa, the supreme Intelligence, at the charioteer's box and Arjuna, the confused and confounded, sitting in the chariot, as the lord of it. On both sides of the chariot stand the armies of the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas, drawn up in battle array ready to strike their total war at the sign.

It is at these tense moments, just before the actual war has started, that we have the setting for the great *Gītā*. Arjuna despaired at the questions of righteousness and the call of duty, confused in mind and intellect, falls prostrate at the Lord's feet, imploring of Him light and guidance; and the Lord, half turning towards Arjuna, holding the reins tight and the five steeds steady, 'as though smiling', gives out a summary of the Truth declared in the various Upaniṣads. No wonder then that an artist, as Bhagavān Śrī Veda-vyāsa was, while trying to express in simpler words the transcendental Truth declarations of the Upaniṣads, has to repeat ten mantras or parts of mantras from this Upaniṣad in the *Gītā*. We have already discussed many similar instances of such borrowings and we shall see later on again many more similar instances.

In the analogy of the chariot, the Self is the master of the chariot; the pure discriminating intellect is the charioteer, the body of the individual is the chariot, and the reins with which the intellect guides the movements of the body is the mind.

It is also noteworthy here that there is a similar comparison in *Śvetāśvatara-upaniṣad*.¹



¹ *duṣṭāśvayuktamiva vāhamenaṁ vidvān-mano dhārayetāpramattaḥ.*

– *Śvetāśvatara-upaniṣad*–2.9

इन्द्रियाणि हयानाहुर्विषयांस्तेषु गोचरान् ।
आत्मेन्द्रियमनोयुक्तं भोक्तेत्याहुर्मनीषिणः ॥ ४ ॥

indriyāṇi hayānāhur-viṣayāṁsteṣu gocarān,
ātmendriyamanoyuktaṁ bhoktetyāhur-manīṣiṇaḥ. (4)

इन्द्रियाणि – the senses; हयान् – horses; आहुः – they say; विषयान् – the sense objects; तेषु – to them (the senses); गोचरान् – roads; आत्मा – the Ātman; इन्द्रिय – senses; मनः – mind; युक्तं – united; भोक्ता – enjoyer; इति – thus; आहुः – they say; मनीषिणः – the wise men

4. The senses (and the instincts) they say, are the horses, and their roads are the sense objects. The wise call Him the enjoyer (when He is) united with the body, the senses and the mind.

Continuing the analogy, the mantra here explains what the horses in the chariot picture stand for. The senses are the horses. Without the sense organs such as the ear, the eyes, the nose, the tongue and the skin, the body chariot cannot move. It is a well-known truth observed in modern psychology that a child born without any of the sense organs is a dead one. We generally observe that a blind man has invariably enhanced power of hearing. Rarely do we find in life an individual who is both blind and deaf. And still more rare are persons (if indeed, such men exist) who have neither the eyes nor the ears nor the sense of touch. In short, we may have among us an unhappy man who does not have one or two sense organs, but rarely, indeed do we have one living among us who has, at once, more than two sense organs missing in him.

This is not a strange phenomenon. After all, there is a purpose behind our taking up the bodies and coming here

to live this mortal existence. The individual ego centres take their individual embodiments and come to live under a set of circumstances, during fixed periods of time, to earn the experiences of living that fixed life. The instruments through which we can gain the experiences of the outer world are our five indriyas. If our indriyas are all shut up, the world outside rolls up into nothingness so far as we are concerned. For example, in our deep sleep state we are not aware of the outer world at all, because, none of our sense organs functions for us during our deep sleep state.

If the eyes are not, the forms are not; with our ears surely we know we cannot grasp ideas of forms. So too, with every other sense organ. If the organs were not with us, our birth in this life would have been a madman's maddening extravagance, purposeless and idle. The Lord, the Creator, is no madman. There is a purpose, definite and sure, in each one's arrival here; be it a worm or be he a king. Since without the sense organs the purpose of our embodiment is defeated, the law sees to it that no child is born with none of the sense organs, for, in that case, the child would be defeating the purpose of its Creator.

The Śruti here says that the horses that draw the body chariot are the sense organs. There is, indeed, a masterly thoroughness in the inimitable expressions of the Hindu scriptures. Though they are so brief in their style, they never leave any statement half said. When they have discussed the chariot, the rider, the driver and the horses, the picture would not have been complete without the explanation of the road on which the horses are to run. The Upaniṣad says that the sense horses trot on the sense objects! How?

The eye can illumine or function only in the realm of form, that is, we can never come to hear with our eyes! So too, the ear, they can perceive only sound; with the ears we can never come to 'see!' The tongue can walk only the path of taste, and the skin, the road of touch. On the whole, it means that the sense organs, because of which the body exists, each function only in its own field of objects.

The wise, in the stanza, means the sages and saints who have Realised in their lives the total Perfection, which is Godhead and also those who, in declaring their intuitional experiences, have become the authors of the Upaniṣads. They declare that the true entity in us, who seems to experience the joys and sorrows of life, is not the Ātman, the all witnessing Intelligence, but the conditioned Ātman. The supreme Intelligence, as conditioned by the body and mind, is the ego centre (jīva), which seems to enjoy and suffer the passing circumstances of this evanescent life, called the saṃsāra. By thus defining the enjoyer in us, the Śruti is definitely making a differentiation between the two entities in us – one, the Truth Principle, the non-doer and the non-enjoyer; and the other, the delusion created ego centre (jīva), which is but a 'reflection' of the supreme Intelligence in the mental lake.



यस्त्वविज्ञानवान्भवत्ययुक्तेन मनसा सदा ।
तस्येन्द्रियाण्यवश्यानि दुष्टाश्च इव सारथेः ॥ ५ ॥

*yastvavijñānavān-bhavatyayuktena manasā sadā,
tasyendriyāṇyavaśyāni duṣṭāśvā iva sāratheḥ. (5)*

यः – (one) who; तु – again; अविज्ञानवान् – devoid of right understanding; भवति – is; अयुक्तेन – with unrestrained; मनसा – the mind; सदा – always; तस्य – his; इन्द्रियाणि – senses; अवश्यानि – uncontrollable; दुष्टाश्वाः – vicious horses; इव – like; सारथेः – for the charioteer

5. One who is always of unrestrained mind and devoid of right understanding, his sense organs become uncontrollable like the vicious horses of a charioteer.

Having explained the analogy, if the Śruti were not to expose her intentions in making the analogy, it would have been an idle indulgence in wordplay. In the style of the Upaniṣads brevity is the law, and to use therein even a single alphabet unnecessarily is considered as a great sin. Here, from this mantra on, we have a team of four stanzas which in their contents express the purpose which was in the mind of the Śruti when she launched this analogy.

In this mantra, an inefficient charioteer allows his reins to be loose, and, naturally, the sturdy steeds run wild and mad as they list, dashing the chariot into bits and wrecking the Lord on the roadside! In the language of the analogy, we are to understand that if we allow an indiscriminate intellect to let our minds loose, then the indriyas (sense organs) running wild among the sense objects shall wreck the body in sensuous excesses. The implication is that if an individual seeker wants to lead a religious life of perfection and hasten his evolution, he has to keep his mind steady with his discriminating intellect, and thus guide the sense horses properly in full restraint and under perfect control. This is hinted at in the following stanza –



यस्तु विज्ञानवान्भवति युक्तेन मनसा सदा ।
तस्येन्द्रियाणि वश्यानि सदश्वा इव सारथेः ॥ ६ ॥

*yastu vijñānavān-bhavati yuktena manasā sadā,
tasyendriyāṇi vaśyāni sadaśvā iva sārathēḥ. (6)*

यः – (one) who; तु – but; विज्ञानवान् – who has right understanding;
भवति – is; युक्तेन – controlled; मनसा – mind; सदा – always; तस्य –
his; इन्द्रियाणि – the senses; वश्यानि – controllable; सदश्वाः – good
horses; इव – like; सारथेः – for the charioteer

*6. But he who has the right understanding, and has a mind always
controlled, his senses are always controllable as the good horses
of the charioteer.*

Just as an intelligent charioteer, by the intelligent manipulations of the reins, guides the horses along the road which the master wants to ride through, so too, an intelligent seeker must, with his pure intellect, keep his mind in restraint and control, and must thus guide his life through the path of God without allowing the horses to run wild, down the embankments into the muddy fields of reckless pleasures there to break the chariot and end the ride, in a tragic wayside crash!!



यस्त्वविज्ञानवान्भवत्यमनस्कः सदाशुचिः ।
न स तत्पदमाप्नोति सःसारं चाधिगच्छति ॥ ७ ॥

*yastvavijñānavān-bhavatyamanaskaḥ sadaśuciḥ,
na sa tat padamāpnoti saṁsāraṁ cādhigacchati. (7)*

यः – (one) who; तु – again; अविज्ञानवान् – devoid of right understanding; भवति – is; अमनस्कः – thoughtless, of uncontrolled mind; सदा – always; अशुचिः – impure; न – never; सः – he; तत् – that; पदम् – goal; आप्नोति – attains; संसारं – the round of births and deaths; च – and; अधिगच्छति – gets into

7. And he who is devoid of proper understanding, thoughtless, and always impure, never attains that goal and gets into the round of births and deaths.

With reference to what we have already discussed, it must be quite clear that the Śruti's intentions are to make the seeker understand that unless he, first of all, trains himself to live the day-to-day life intelligently following the codes of morality and ethics, he shall not stand any chance of succeeding in the Life Divine. Śruti is never tired of repeating, at every stage the all important fact that spiritual practices cannot produce the total effect of perfection or happiness unless the devotee is ready, first of all, to learn to live a life of truthfulness and perfect self-control. One who is not constantly bringing his discriminative understanding in curbing the impulses of his mind is one who is unyoked (ayukta) and the wise laugh at his animalism and note him down as an avijñānavān.

In modern times we are hearing at all hands, especially among the educated classes, that our sacred religion is empty, hollow and useless! There are some monstrous, university educated illiterates, who, in their puffed-up vanities, hurl shameless calumnies against this great religion Hinduism. This sādhu has met personally some of them, and when cornered to explain why they condemn Hinduism,

some of them, at least, seem to come out with a real cause; they say that they had tried bhakti, karma and other yogas for a long time continuously, but that they were not able to enjoy even a trace of the joy and happiness which the yogas promise as a reward! Such desperados, indeed are, in themselves, a sad commentary upon Hinduism, the science of self-perfection.

Even in the Vaidika days, when, we all know the people lived a much more self-controlled life of honesty and goodness, the Śrutis were insisting with extra emphasis upon the need and importance of living a life of perfect self-control for every seeker. And our poor seekers, living the Broadway life, market dishonesties, black marketing lusts and corruption – madness of every kind – if they do some minutes of japa and so on, how can they come to enjoy the blessings of the absolute Perfection? All his kīrtanas and bhajanas, japa and tapa, temple going, and Brāhmaṇa feedings are waste of time and money, if the devotee is not prepared to keep his mind always under control and thus ultimately come to control in slow degrees the mad onrush of the sense organs! This famous fact is hinted at here by the Śruti.

Those who fail to keep up an intelligent self-control upon their own endless sense demands, not only fail to climb up the ladder of perfection and thus ultimately reach the supreme Godhead (known to us in the scriptures as tat-padam... that state), but also, says the Śruti, slowly fall in the scale of evolution and thus reach the lower states of animal existence. Man, though he is an animal, is considered as the roof and crown of beings because of his reasoning capacity.

He alone is the one animal who can, at each challenge in life, discriminate between the path of the good and the path of the pleasant, and firmly make a bid always to stick to the path of the good.

When man, of his own accord, refuses the blessings of his power of discrimination, which his intellect is capable of, he is deliberately flouting his privileges as man. And when one has thus, of his own free will, chosen to be an animal, certainly, nature shall bless him with the sorrows and limitations of the animal beings! Man alone is the glorious heir to the supreme joy arising out of the Knowledge achieved, and therefore, of the lived perfections.

It is the lot of the animals 'to live to eat', suffer meekly the gruesome burden of voiceless sorrows and live a life of delusions and empty joys. The Śruti here clearly points out that the men of no self-control, not only fail to reach the supreme state of joy and peace, but also fall back into the pit of sorrow at the very centre of the whirl of birth and death (saṃsāraṃ ca adhigacchati).



यस्तु विज्ञानवान्भवति समनस्कः सदा शुचिः ।
स तु तत्पदमाप्नोति यस्माद्भूयो न जायते ॥ ८ ॥

*yastu vijñānavān-bhavati samanaskaḥ sadā śuciḥ,
sa tu tat-padam-āpnoti yasmād-bhūyo na jāyate. (8)*

यः – who; तु – but; विज्ञानवान् – intelligent; भवति – is; समनस्कः – with the mind controlled; सदा शुचिः – ever pure; सः – he; तु – verily;

तत् – that; पदम् – goal; आप्नोति – reaches; यस्मात् – from where; भूयः – again; न जायते – is never born

8. But he who is intelligent, ever pure and with the mind controlled, verily reaches that goal from whence none is born again.

In the previous stanza we were told of the tragic end of a man who does not try to control his sense appetites, but, like an unintelligent animal, ever lives the life of the sensuous excesses and voluptuous revelries. Had the Upaniṣad left the statement at that, some of us might have come to despair at the feeling that there is no hope of salvation after having born for once as a man; for, don't we see around and is it not our own experience that the sense demands are very powerful and that they are not urges easy to be ignored or controlled? This stanza shows how logical and complete is the style of the ṛṣis, and the style represents the men and their head and heart personalities, to us!!

The stanza under review asserts positively that one who, through steady practice, has come to have a large share of self-control, and therefore, is naturally ever pure, reaches, through degrees of spiritual growth, that state of Perfection, which is eternal and immortal and from which the yogī, who has once reached it, never comes back.

Whence none is born again (yasmād bhūyo na jāyate) – A common doubt that often comes to the early sādḥaka as well as to the uninitiated students is being answered here. During life nobody can ever remain, even for a moment, without action and actions have reactions; thus, at death there must surely be a fund of reactions yet to be experienced by every

ego centre. And, naturally, the jīvas are born again into such embodiments and are placed in such circumstances where they can find the necessary field and the necessary instruments to reap the required reactions. A true devotee, having lived the life of the Upaniṣads and having thus reached the supreme state (tat-padām) shall not return to this whirl of birth and death of saṁsāra. Why not?

And if man were to come back thus to the realm of delusions again, what is the use of his having undergone such an amount of struggle, and having practised so much of self-restraint and self-control? In what way is he then different from the sensuous, vicious, self-indulgent animal man? This doubt generally dabs the enthusiasm of the sādḥaka. Kind Śruti here gives the answer that such a one reaches the supreme goal, 'from whence none is born again'.

The supreme goal is the realisation of our identity with the All-soul, the Brahman. With this true identification, the false identifications with the mind-intellect equipment, the ego sense, totally ends. We cannot have the knowledge of the rope and the serpent at one and the same time; so too, we cannot have at once the knowledge of the Self and the false delusory identifications with matter called the ego, which is the jīva. Birth and death belong to the ignorance created sense of ego; when the ego has once forever ended in the knowledge of our real nature, all dreams of birth and death also end!!



विज्ञानसारथिर्यस्तु मनःप्रग्रहवान्नरः ।
सोऽध्वनः पारमाप्नोति तद्विष्णोः परमं पदम् ॥९॥

*vijñānasārathir-yastu manaḥ-pragrahavān-naraḥ,
so'dhvanaḥ pāram-āpnoti tad-viṣṇoḥ paramaṁ padam. (9)*

विज्ञानसारथिः – (one who) has intelligence for his charioteer;
यस्तु – one who; मनः – the mind; प्रग्रहवान् – (well controlled)
rein; नरः – man; सः – he; अध्वनः – of the journey; पारम् – the end;
आप्नोति – attains; तत् – that is; विष्णोः – of Viṣṇu; परमं – supreme;
पदम् – place, state

*9. The man who has intelligence for his charioteer and the well
controlled mind as the rein – he attains the end of the journey, that
supreme place of Viṣṇu (the all-pervading Ātman).*

Concluding the analogy portion, the Śruti states in this stanza that the individual who has allowed his indriyas to function under the dictatorial charge of his pure intellect alone can reach the supreme destination. In our ordinary drives, if the driver be a drunken fool, it is obvious that we will not reach our place of appointment.

In our life, ordinarily, we are careless, and under the instructions of an impure intellect, we run amok among the sense objects whipped by the lashing strokes of an uncontrolled mind's vicious urges; panting and exhausted, weary and fatigued, emaciated and weak, the so called man of the world lives a life of unrest and disappointment, even though he is housed in a palace, clothed in silk and rolling in a feather bed! None of the material successes and no amount of sense objects can give such a shattered human personality any taste of the real joy and the godly peace, which are the birthrights of a full grown man.

But, on the other hand, we find a sage or a saint without any of the sense objects around him, housed under some tree, clothed in rags, rolling on stones, yet withal, supremely happy and divinely peaceful. It becomes evident, if we just open our eyes and observe these two scenes, that the real śānti is not a product to be concocted from a favourable setting of the sense objects around us. Contentment and inner joy can gurgle up from the bosom of an individual, only if he has trained his mind to function under a well disciplined self-control. Unless we bring the play of the mind under strict and continuous supervision of an ever vigilant intellectual discrimination in us, we shall not, during our life, progress steadily towards our life's goal – the temple of peace. This supreme goal is mentioned here as the place of Viṣṇu. It would be absurd if a student of Vedānta were to understand that the 'place of Viṣṇu is the Paurāṇika concept of Vaikuṇṭha'. For purpose of explaining the scripture Viṣṇu is to be conceived of as one of the Trinities, but here, the meaning is, the all-pervading Vāsudeva, the Paramātmān.



इन्द्रियेभ्यः परा ह्यर्था अर्थेभ्यश्च परं मनः ।

मनसस्तु परा बुद्धिर्बुद्धेरात्मा महान्परः ॥ १० ॥

*indriyebhyaḥ parā hyarthā arthebhyasca param manah
manasastu parā buddhir-buddherātmā mahān-parah. (10)*

इन्द्रियेभ्यः – than the senses; परा – superior; हि – indeed; अर्थाः – sense objects; अर्थेभ्यः – than the sense objects; च – and; परं – superior; मनः – the mind; मनसः – than the mind; तु – again;

परा – superior; बुद्धिः – the intellect; बुद्धेः – than the intellect;
आत्मा – the Self; महान् – the great; परः – beyond

10. *Beyond the senses are the sense objects; beyond these objects is the mind; beyond the mind is the intellect and beyond the intellect is the great Self.*

This and the following mantra together provide the sādḥaka with a line of thinking which he could pursue during his deep meditations upon the immortal and the eternal essence which is the core of his existence. Earlier we had already explained that, in the language of our philosophical textbooks, ‘beyond’ or ‘within’ indicate the comparative subtleties between two or more factors; subtleties, in such cases, being measured by the greater pervasiveness of one factor over the other. The Śruti here starts with the grossest manifestation of Truth, and, slowly guiding the student through degrees of greater and greater subtleties, ultimately introduces him into the very realm of the subtlest of the subtle, the Ātman, that resides in the holy of the holies in us.

This mantra is clearly echoed in *Gītā*.¹

The meanings of the various portions of this mantra, though clear in themselves, present some obvious difficulties in understanding the opening statement that the sense objects are subtler than the sense organs themselves. Modern science explains to us that there is no mechanism conceived of by man in his laboratories which is as subtle as the sure dictaphone provided in our ears or the ready camera adjustments of our

¹ *indriyāṇi parāṇyāhur-indriyebhyaḥ param manaḥ,
manasastu parā buddhiryo buddheḥ paratastu saḥ. – Gītā-3.42*

eyes, or for that matter the sensitive equipment in our organs of touch or taste. None of the above has ever been beaten even by the best of the discoveries of man, even during this era of science! Yet the Śruti dares to declare that ‘subtler than the sense organs are the sense objects’. It is natural then that the student reading and pondering over this mantra should come to wonder how the forms are greater than the ‘eyes’ or the ‘sounds’ greater than the ‘ears’ or the ‘taste’ greater than the organ of taste.

This portion of the mantra is explained by teachers to their disciples in the Himalayan valleys very clearly. For example, this very sādhu found it difficult to gulp this statement down, and had to approach his Master for extra explanations. Doubts in philosophy have a knack of exhausting the student at their very first appearance, and when the explanations come from a true Master, all of a sudden the student finds himself wondering how the doubts ever arose at all in him when their explanations were so simple and obvious!!

Were it not for the different ‘forms’ available in the world outside, we would not have been able to feel or assert that we have ‘eyes’. If the world were to be steeped in silence all would have been deaf; for, in such a condition the sense organ, ‘ear’ has no justification for or proof of its very existence. In this sense, the sense objects are the very cause for the sense organs.

It may be more clear, if we take a modern example from our own political life. The President of the Indian Republic, or for that matter, the very Parliament itself would not have

any existence, if the Indian janatā were not there! The people of a country is the cause for the state and for the government of that country. Certainly the total might and power of the State is not to be found in any of the individual Indian; yet, the janatā of the country is the cause for the state in that country.

In this sense, the sense objects are the causes for the sense organs. Since cause is always subtler than its effects, the Śruti is fully justified in explaining to us that ‘beyond the sense organs lie the fields of sense objects’ such as form, sound, taste, smell and touch.

Beyond the objects is the mind – The significance is self-evident. Mind is certainly much more subtler than the causes of sense organs. But for the mind, the sense impulses reported by the sense organs as they come in contact with the sense objects would not have been registered and synchronised together to give us the total impression of the objects, as the table, the chair and so on.

Beyond the mind is the intellect – In our early discussions on the fundamental principles of Vedānta, we had discussed the scope and structure of the human mind when we said that the mind is the ‘receiving and dispatching clerk’ in the inner secretariat. The mind receives impulses sent in by five sense organs and synthesises them into one consolidated report, and passes it up to the intellect.

The decisiveness of the intellect is that which finally disposes off the file; there the impulses received are checked up with the previous experiences of similar impulses, which are stored away in the memory, and, with reference to and

in terms of the past experiences, the present impulses are revalued and correctly classified. The intellect thereupon passes down its judgement, which in its turn is, for the necessary execution of orders, pushed back by the mind to the five sense organs, who implicitly act as they are required in the outer fields of the sense objects.

Here, the scheme of the inner government is so elaborately discussed only to show the greater importance the intellect has over the mind. The scripture is perfectly justified in making her statement that the intellect is subtler than the mind.

Beyond the intellect is the great Self – Naturally so. The great Self is what we have so far discussed in our earlier lectures as the total mind or the total intellect, the Hiranyagarbha. In our false sense of egoism and delusion created sense of separateness, we presume generally, that we think our own thoughts, totally independent of the thoughts of others! We also presume that our thoughts are exclusively our own and nobody need worry about the texture or the quality of our individual secret thoughts! This is an absurd and false statement worthy to be blabbered only by a thoughtless, uneducated, barbarian! Nobody can think even a single thought in absolute independence and freedom from the whole.

Let us take an example and try to understand it. Mr. Das returning from his office, takes his tiffin, and lying on an easy chair in his pyjamas, comes to entertain an idea that he must go to the 'picture'. He soon comes to feel that he has a wish to see the 'picture' and that it is his wish. Now

friends, do you accept that this clerk after his day's work, resting in his veranda, is the sole author of this idea? Is he not a product of the thoughts and values of his age (his great grandfather would never have thought of such an idea, since there was no cinema in his time), a slave to the conscious and the unconscious influences that he has been receiving in the society during the week and a victim of the silent murmurings of the innumerable advertisements that he must have seen and the thousands of congratulatory statements heard from his friend who applauded this particular 'picture'? And, however intelligent he may be, he would yet shamelessly declare that, 'go to the picture' was his own independent individual idea which came to him that evening!

In fact, none of us can independently feel or think. We, each of us, live every moment of our life influenced by others; and if we be true in our convictions and noble in our values of life, we shall be, to that degree, influencing the total.

The total intellect is the concept of the God Principle. Here the 'intellect' stands for the entire 'inner instrument' antaḥ-karaṇa. It must certainly be obvious to us now that the total intellect is certainly subtler than the individual intellect.



महतः परमव्यक्तमव्यक्तात्पुरुषः परः ।
पुरुषान्न परं किञ्चित्सा काष्ठा सा परा गतिः ॥ ११ ॥

*mahataḥ paramavyaktam-avyaktāt puruṣaḥ paraḥ
puruṣānna paraṁ kiñcit-sā kāṣṭhā sā parā gatiḥ. (11)*

महतः – beyond the great Self (mahat); परम् – is superior; अव्यक्तम् – the unmanifested; अव्यक्तात् – than the unmanifested; पुरुषः – Puruṣa; परः – is superior; पुरुषात् – than the Puruṣa; परं – is superior; न किञ्चित् – there is nothing; सा – that; काष्ठा – acme, the end; सा – that; परा – highest, the Supreme; गतिः – goal

11. *Beyond the great (mahat) is the unmanifested (avyaktam). Beyond the avyaktam (prakṛti) is the Puruṣa; beyond the Puruṣa there is nothing; that is the end; that is the highest goal.*

The total intellect described in the previous mantra constitutes, as we know, the Hiranyagarbha, which is the state of the world as it first emerges out of its very seed condition, as a sprout. We all know that in a fig seed we have, in fact, in an unmanifest condition, the entire tree itself. Under favourable conditions, through the minute holes in the skin of the seed, water is absorbed and the food contents of the seed bloat out and tear the testa and the tegmen which are the coatings of the seed. The radicle and the plumule, fattening themselves upon the ready food stored away in the cotyledons slowly shoot out through the aperture made in the skin of the seed. At this stage the seed is said to be sprouting.

Similarly, the supreme Truth, the all-pervading pure Existence, eternally remains in its unsullied state of Perfection. Due to the play of māyā, pure Consciousness starts projecting Itself through various layers of grossness to end ultimately in its manifestation as the jagat. In the analogy of the seed, if the total intellect be the condition of the sprout, where manifestation has just started becoming evident, then the condition of the tree in the seed as unmanifest would

correspond with the state of avyakta, stated in the mantra. The avyakta state is the state of the unmanifest jagat; something like the condition of each of us in our mother's womb. It may be noted here that avyaktam, pradhāna, mūla-prakṛti, avyākṛti and māyā, are synonymous terms.

Beyond avyaktam is the Puruṣa – Subtler than the state called the unmanifest is the Supreme, pure Existence, termed in the Upaniṣad, in this mantra, as Puruṣa. This is the subtlest of the subtle factors which is the supreme goal of all the manifested world.

In our enquiries into the last two mantras, we were seeking from the grossest external manifestations of Truth, through layers of greater and greater subtleties, to the supreme point of purity and subtlety, the Truth. We find in degrees that the grossest are the sense organs and beyond them are the sense objects. Still subtler is the mind. Beyond the mind is the intellect. Subtler than the intellect is the total intellect. Yet subtler is the unmanifest, and, herein we concluded by declaring, that subtler than the unmanifest, the supreme goal of our seeking, is the Puruṣa, the Truth. As logic would have it, it is possible that in this chain of varying degrees of subtlety we may yet come to enquire what is subtler than the Puruṣa. In this case, we may tumble down into the logical absurdity known in Sanskrit as anavasthā doṣa (Regressio ad Infinitum). To avoid this and to satisfy fully an enquiring intellect, Śruti here clearly explains, 'beyond the Puruṣa there is nothing'.

It may yet be wondered by the seekers whether this 'Puruṣa tattva' is after all the supreme Truth, by identifying

with which, we may reach that state of supreme Perfection and Peace. In order to allay all such vague doubts, and to rewind all the loose ends into one cord, the scripture, here in this mantra, definitely asserts (sā kāṣṭhā) ‘that is the end’.



एष सर्वेषु भूतेषु गूढोत्मा न प्रकाशते ।
दृश्यते त्वग्रया बुद्ध्या सूक्ष्मया सूक्ष्मदर्शिभिः ॥ १२ ॥

*eṣa sarveṣu bhūteṣu gūḍhotmā na prakāṣate,
drśyate tvagryayā buddhyā sūkṣmayā sūkṣmadarśibhiḥ. (12)*

एषः – this; सर्वेषु – in all; भूतेषु – in beings; गूढः – hidden; आत्मा – Ātman; न प्रकाशते – does not shine (reveal); दृश्यते – is seen; तु – but; अग्रया – sharp; बुद्ध्या – by intellect; सूक्ष्मया – through subtle; सूक्ष्मदर्शिभिः – by the seers of subtle (vision)

12. *This Ātman is hidden in all beings and does not shine forth, but is seen by subtle seers through their sharp and subtle intellect.*

Self-realisation according to Vedānta is not a mere experiencing of the true nature of our divinity alone. To rediscover ourselves to be none other than God is not, in itself, a full Realisation accepted by the śāstras. No Mahātmā’s work is ended unless he could feel a perfect oneness with all in his own Self. If he were to realise himself to be God and all others as worm-men, his realisation is faulty and absurd. The pot space in getting rid of its false ideas of identity with the pot, shall realise at once its oneness with the entire universal space. Similarly, when a seeker, through patient and constant practices, rids himself of

his ego and the ego bound identification with his body, mind and intellect, he will realise that the sum-total – whole – is Truth alone ‘which I am, which I am’.

In short ‘pratyagātmā-brahmaikya-jñānam’ (the knowledge of the oneness of the innermost Self with the Total Self) is the process of the path of knowledge. This is amply made self-evident in this mantra. In the previous mantra, we had a discussion of the world of the sense organs, the world of the sense objects, the world of the mind, the intellect, the total mind, and of the unmanifest; and before the mantra concluded its declarations, it also indicated the supreme factor, the Puruṣa. In this mantra, which immediately follows the previous one, we have the discussion of the ‘secret Self’ that lies concealed in ‘all beings’. The idea implied therein is obviously the oneness of the ‘inner’ individual Self and the ‘outer’ total Self.

Hidden in all beings – Ātman, the very Self of the individual, can never be hidden from us, and yet, under the veil of ignorance and the thick walls of negativities and delusions, the Self seems to be hidden from our egocentric instruments of cognitions, feelings and understandings, such as the sense organs, the mind and the intellect. The Self is only as much hidden from us, because of our delusions and the delusion created ego, as the rope is hidden from us because of our mental delusions and the delusion created serpent!!

Just as only those who can approach the ‘serpent in the dark’ with a peaceful mind, in a spirit of enquiry and self-discovery, can rediscover the rope, so too only a seeker of Truth, whose mind has calmed down from its agitations for sense indulgences and who, therefore, can approach the great

mission of life in a spirit of enquiry and self-discovery, can come to discover the Ātma-tattva, the source of all life, as himself!



यच्छेद्वाङ्मनसी प्राज्ञस्तद्यच्छेज्ज्ञान आत्मनि ।
ज्ञानमात्मनि महति नियच्छेत्तद्यच्छेच्छान्त आत्मनि ॥ १३ ॥

*yacched-vāṅmanasī prājñastad-yacchej-jñāna ātmani,
jñānamātmani mahati niyacchet tad yacchecchānta ātmani. (13)*

यच्छेत् – (should) merge; वाक् – word(speech); मनसी – in the mind; प्राज्ञः – the wise; तत् – that (mind); यच्छेत् – should merge; ज्ञान आत्मनि – in the intellect (knowledge of the Self); ज्ञानम् – the intellect; आत्मनि महति – into the great Ātman (i.e. Hiraṇyagarbha); नियच्छेत् – should sink (submerge); तत् – that (great Ātman); यच्छेत् – should merge; शान्त आत्मनि – into the peaceful Ātman

13. *Let the wise sink his speech into the mind, the mind into the intellect and the intellect into the great Ātman and the great Ātman into the peaceful Ātman.*

The Āryan nature is such that he is not satisfied by a mere philosophical idea, however poetical and utopian it may be; for the Āryan is too much of a creature of purpose and practical vision. Unless an idealism is supported by a perfect technique of self-discipline by which the practitioner can come to live as an experience for himself all the joys it promises, it is totally rejected and laughed at by the sturdy intellect and courageous mind of the true Āryan stock!

True to this spirit of the country and its people, Indian philosophy is never a mere textbook of stale and fantastic ideas strung together to form a garland to applaud a passing mood of some tumbling generation! Immediately following an explanation of the supreme state of Existence, there is, in the mantra now under discussion, a vivid detailed explanation of the technique by which we can come to realise that state of Perfection indicated by the term 'Puruṣa'.

Merge the speech in the mind – There are some mere Sanskrit scholars (paṇḍitas) who take the limited view of the words and come to read into the scriptural text too tight a meaning, and thus ruin the very broad hints on Truth given in the scriptures. The very style of the scripture is to express what Śruti has to say, more with the suggestiveness of the words than with the literal word meaning. More harm than good is done by the mere Sanskrit scholars trying to play their havoc in the field of the scriptures. With their dry knowledge of words, trying to explain the science of sciences, which deals with the Absolute, can but be a folly and a disastrous crime.

The scriptural text here is to be understood as indicating at once both the organs of knowledge and action by the mere mention of one of them, namely, the speech (vāk). 'All the organs of action and of knowledge have to be brought under perfect control of the mind' is the advice of the Śruti.

Thereafter, the mind is to be sunk into the intellect, meaning, the mental tossings, doubts, desires, emotions and so on, are to be completely brought under the iron grip of the intellect and its powers of discrimination. The process is continued by lifting our identification with our individual

intellect and fixing it up with the grand total whole. This again is to be sublimated into its fundamental cause, the state of sleepless sleep, the *turiya avasthā*, transcending which the seeker in his higher meditations reaches the goal of life, there, to eternally recognise himself, in a powerful subjective experience, to be the *Puruṣa* Himself.



उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत ।
क्षुरस्य धारा निशिता दुरत्यया
दुर्गं पथस्तत्कवयो वदन्ति ॥ १४ ॥

*uttiṣṭhata jāgrata prāpya varān-nibodhata,
kṣurasya dhārā niśitā-duratyayā
durgam pathastat-kavayo vadanti. (14)*

उत्तिष्ठत – arise; जाग्रत – awake; प्राप्य – having reached; वरान् – the great (Teachers); निबोधत – learn (realise that *Ātman*); क्षुरस्य – of a razor; धारा – edge; निशिता – sharp; दुरत्यया – difficult to cross; दुर्गं – hard to tread; पथः – path; तत् – that; कवयः – the wise; वदन्ति – say

14. Arise! Awake! Having reached the great (Teachers) learn (realise that Ātman). Like the sharp edge of a razor is that path, difficult to cross and hard to tread – thus say the wise.

Upaniṣads are the declarations of Truth, as experienced by the Upaniṣad ṛṣis in the white heat of their living meditations. An individual even when he comes to discover an ordinary joy or beauty almost goes mad and strives to explain the experiences

to his fellow men. Thus we have the songs of bards in every language, besides the various columns of literature on every branch of knowledge. Instances are not wanting where scientists have almost gone mad, when they suddenly, during their deep study, discovered for themselves one more secret of nature. Newton, certainly, could not have felt so much the pain of the apple falling on his nose as the joy of his thoughts over a gravitational force that draws everything towards the earth! Archimedes ran naked, directly from his bath tub, crying 'Eureka! Eureka!' through the streets of the city, when he discovered, for the first time, how volumes can be measured by measuring the water displaced by material objects!

Similarly, when the great ṛṣis of old, in their silent contemplations upon Truth, came to realise the godliness that is eternally their nature, they roared forth their joy calls and victory trumpets to their generation in their joy and feeling of the absolute Perfection. Instances are many in the various Upaniṣads, where the ṛṣis directly call their generation to follow the path, seeking Truth until each realises for himself his identity with the Godhead.

Here in the mantra under discussion, we have the world famous call of the spiritual kingdom... the call of hope and glory... to man rotting in his dejections and sorrows. This famous call to man to 'Arise and Awake' has been adopted by Śrī Swami Vivekananda as his mission's emblem.

Arise! Awake! – O man, rotting in the quagmire of saṃsāra! Arise! Turn towards the brilliant sunlit land of Perfection and walk through the path shown to us by the ṛṣis. Walk

the path, and reach the glorious summit from where you can experience that your sense of limitations and imperfections, hopes and desires, successes and failures, loves and hatreds, birth and death, were all but a gruesome midsummer night's dream!!

Mere rising from the bed is not at once a total ending of sleep. It is our agreed experience that although we have arisen from our pillows we are not immediately as alert and fully awake to the external world as we would be after a time. Certainly, there is a lot of difference between our sudden rising from the bed and our state of full awakening.

Rude shocks in life such as loss of property, sudden bereavements, disappointments in love and such other causes may temporarily make us realise the falsity of the values lived by us in our day-to-day life of competition and selfishness. Man, under this stress in life, comes to feel the hollowness of life and, for the time being, comes to entertain a seemingly healthy *vairāgya*! But this is only a passing mood. In many of us this mood does come at some time or the other, but soon it passes off as an impotent impulse. This state, temporary opening of our mind to the hollowness of life as lived by us, is here indicated by the word 'arise'. At this state the seeker is not fully aware of the very change that has taken place in him. Hence the *ṛṣis* cry out 'Awake', meaning that the one who has, under the lash of circumstances, come to accomplish the command 'Arise', should try his best to come to a fuller realisation of what has actually happened within him in his personality, and thus fully get himself awakened.

This awakening can be effective only when one, who has 'arisen', rushes to the feet of a real Guru (who is well

versed in the scriptures and also well-established in the Brāhmika Consciousness, and learn the Brahmavidyā.

Why should we, at all, have a Guru? This is often asked by almost all the modern educated class of people. But they at once forget that when even as mechanical an art as typewriting cannot be mastered without an instructor, no one can pursue the path of Self-realisation without the help of a Master.

Again, the path is very difficult – ‘Like the sharp edge of a razor is that path’. Anybody who has at least made even a sportive attempt to live always in the path of good shall realise how slippery and narrow is the path!! A life dedicated to perfect self-control and self-discipline, a life of full awareness and discrimination is no easy life. A sādhu sitting under a tree may be an ‘idler’ to a city-bred insurance agent or a jungle woodcutter! But if only the insurance agent would try to do what the sādhu is doing even for an hour!!

The statement that the path is as risky as the knife edge is made by the Śruti only to emphasise the importance in strictly following the path, under all conditions and circumstances. This should not, in any sense of the term, be misconstrued that the path is impossibly difficult; nothing of that sort is it to a true seeker.

Lord Death could claim the statement as his own. But he does not, and, in this, he is not showing off any sense of assumed modesty. In Vedānta, we do not accept any statement made by anybody ‘as his own experience’ with

any credulity!! Imaginations and fancied ideas have no place in Vedānta. We accept only words and statements that have come to us by a long line of Teacher-disciple descendants. Hence, Lord Death is quoting here the wise as having made this statement in the ancient days! (kavayo vadanti).

According to the ṛṣis any civilisation or culture which precludes the experience and the recognition of divinity in man is an existence in continuous sleep and a progress through tumbling falls!!



अशब्दमस्पर्शमरूपमव्ययं
तथारसं नित्यमगन्धवच्च यत् ।
अनाद्यनन्तं महतः परं ध्रुवं
निचाय्य तन्मृत्युमुखात्प्रमुच्यते ॥ १५ ॥

*aśabdamasparśamarūpamavyayam
tathārasam nityamagandhavacca yat,
anādyanantam mahataḥ param dhruvam
nicāyya tanmr̥tyumukhāt-pramucyate. (15)*

अशब्दम् – without sound; अस्पर्शम् – without touch; अरूपम् – without form; अव्ययं – without decay; तथा – thus; अरसं – without taste; नित्यम् – eternal; अगन्धवत् – without smell; च – and; यत् – that which; अनाद्यनन्तम् – without beginning or end; महतः परं – beyond (superior to) the mahat; ध्रुवं – changeless; निचाय्य – having known (Realised); तत् – that (Ātman); मृत्यु-मुखात् – from the jaws of death; प्रमुच्यते – is freed

15. *He, who has realised that (Ātman) which is without sound, without touch, without form, without decay, and also without taste, without smell, without beginning, without end, beyond the mahat (great), eternal and unchanging, is freed from the jaws of death.*

You must be remembering that the burning question which Naciketā submitted to his Master, Lord Death, was, whether there was really an existence after death or not? Lord Death refuses to give him a direct reply in a parliamentary yes or no style, and thus skeptics and low atheists, not having the intellectual capacity of understanding the correct import of the very method of religion and religious teachings, quote such instances and cry that even the greatest of Gurus have only succeeded in evading the questions directly asked by the ignorant seekers. But scientifically speaking, the question, though seemingly sincere and correct, is a philosophical absurdity, and no true thinker can afford to answer such a wrong question, in terms of a completely scientific language. If supposing Lord Death were to say that there is no life after death he would certainly be telling a lie, since, pure Existence must eternally exist. If, on the other hand, Lord Death were to answer that there was existence after death, again, he would be false. He would be wrong scientifically, for, in the realm of pure Existence, there could be no trace of non-existence, and the idea of existence can maintain itself only with reference to its opposite, namely, non-existence. It was under a similar awkward situation that Lord Buddha also had to keep mum when his disciples pointedly asked him if there was a God or not.

Though Lord Death is not directly answering his disciple, the answer is there in his words for the wise and the intelligent to grasp intuitively.

The mantra under discussion explains the true nature of the Self in its absolute state of Perfection, in terms of a language conceived for explaining things and for narrating experiences which are finite and limited. Our concept of the world and the things in it is, as we have already seen, only through the five small peepholes in our body, constituted of our five sense organs. What we cognise or experience in our life is explained in terms of the sounds heard, the touches felt, the forms seen, the tastes enjoyed or the smells experienced.

In short, the world constituted of matter is cognised, and the cognition is expressed in terms of the properties of matter. In her attempt to discuss and explain the abode of the Spirit, Śruti had to point out to us the distant horizon of the world of matter and explain to us, 'There in the yonder lies the field of pure Consciousness, the kingdom of the Spirit.'

At the boundaries of the finite world of matter all languages stop. Beyond them only the language of the soul, silent meditation, is available for the Spirit to converse with the Spirit. Naturally, Śruti finds no other convenient and scientific style of language to explain the inexplicable, except by employing a language of repeated negations.

Thus, in this mantra, we have the Ātman explained to us in all its transcendental glory in the language of negation as aśabda (without sound), asparśa (without touch), arūpa (without form) arasa (without taste) and agandha (without smell). This is the only method available for the science of Truth to explain itself in terms of a finite language.

In negating the properties of matter such as sound, touch, form, taste and smell, the Śruti is indicating that our sense organs cannot perceive Truth as such.

nityam (eternal) – Because Truth is beyond the comprehension of the sense organs, it is eternal; for, a pot or a table or a chair, perceivable by the indriyas, is finite. Thus, in negating for our sense organs any play in the world of Truth, Śruti has already indicated Its eternal nature too.

anādyanantam (without beginning and without end) – Not satisfied with the mere indication of the eternal nature of the soul, by the very language of negation employed, Śruti has already expressed in the first line of the mantra that Truth is eternal (nityam). And in her anxiety to drive home the idea into the mind of the seekers, she almost commits a sin of repetition when she says that Truth is without beginning and without end. When we digest this epithet in a true understanding of the science of Brahmavidyā we shall find that without being a mere repetition, it is a well chosen word to give us a clear idea of everything suggested by it.

That which has an end, meaning, a perishable thing, perishes only to lose its present state of existence; and in thus perishing it can only go back to the condition of its cause. If a clay pot perishes, it can only become mud which is the cause from which it had risen. If a seed ends it can only be to become a tree, which is its immediate cause, or it can decay to become the very elements from which it came. When we say that Mr. Gupta has died or is no more, we only mean that the elements which for a time constituted themselves into the 'form' of Mr. Gupta are no longer keeping that 'form'

but have merged with the dust. In the language of physics, 'nothing is lost when a candle burns!'

Thus, all finite things end only to go back to the cause from which they had been born. In denying an end to Truth, Śruti is indicating to us that Truth is the cause of all causes and that it has no cause into which it can go back; this also means that Truth, as such, is not the modification of anything. It is the ultimate. Hence it is also beginningless.

dhruvam (immutable, changeless) – From the above it must be quite clear how pure Consciousness, the Self, in its transcendental nature, is ever changeless.

If such be the plane of Truth, beyond the cognition of the sense organs, the mind and the intellect, even if it be changeless, eternal, beyond the Hiranyagarbha, beginningless and endless, why should a seeker, after all, seek to establish his identity with it? Is it not more sure, certain and profitable to reach the day-to-day marketplaces to play the sorrowful game of life, and there to strive and struggle, to sweat and toil, to sob and sigh, in between the flashes of laughter and mirth, smile and dance, sing and play?

Śruti is here explaining why man should seek and ultimately fulfil himself in establishing his true identity with this supreme state of Perfection. He who has known the state of eternal bliss is freed from the jaws of death. There is no doubt, indeed, that no other fear in life is so common to all as the dread of death. Hence the word 'death' is to be understood not in its limited aspect of men and beings breathing their last, leaving their forms on the surface of the

globe to perish and decay. 'Death' is used here in its widest scope bringing within its embrace all the finiteness in the world of matter.

Thus, the mantra explains to the deluded man that he who can seek constantly, and ultimately succeed in establishing his identity with this state of Perfection, to him there is no more a world of finite sense impulses to wreck his perfect joys by bringing stormy sorrows and tumultuous despairs into his bosom.

nicāyya (having known) – This does not mean 'to know Truth' in the sense we know a table or a chair. When the mantra has, in its very first line, negated the sense organs any play in world of Truth, it has negated in effect the play of the mind and the intellect also. Here the term 'having known' only means 'experience subjectively'. Intuitive experience alone is the mode of 'knowing' the Truth Absolute.



नाचिकेतमुपाख्यानं मृत्युप्रोक्तं सनातनम् ।
उत्त्वा श्रुत्वा च मेधावी ब्रह्मलोके महीयते ॥ १६ ॥

*nāciketamupākhyānaṁ mṛtyuproktaṁ sanātanam,
uktvā śrutvā ca medhāvī brahmaloke mahīyate. (16)*

नाचिकेतम् – that of Naciketā; उपाख्यानं – the story; मृत्युप्रोक्तं – told by Lord Death; सनातनम् – the ancient; उत्त्वा – having related; श्रुत्वा – having heard; च – and; मेधावी – the intelligent one; ब्रह्मलोके – in the world of Brahman; महीयते – is glorified

16. *The intelligent one, having heard and repeated this ancient story of Naciketā as told by Lord Death, is glorified in the world of Brahman.*

In the 16th and 17th mantras with which the first chapter of *Kaṭhopanīṣad* ends, we have a brief statement glorifying the very Upanīṣad. Such statements of eulogy are very frequent in the style of the scriptures and according to Śrī Śaṅkarācārya these statements are often pronounced with a view to encouraging the seekers to study and follow the path.

It is noteworthy that Śrī Śaṅkarācārya in his commentary points out that Brahma-loka can have two interpretations: it can be either ‘the world of the Creator’ meaning the Hiranyagarbha state (Brahma-loka) or it can be the self-effulgent Brahman (Brahma-rūpī loka), where ‘loka’ means prakāśa-rūpa. In short, if an intelligent one, who has a large share of retentive capacity and has memorised the first three vallīs of this Upanīṣad, were to repeat these mantras often in the presence of others, and thus contribute to the dissemination of them, he shall come to enjoy the transcendental joys of the Brahma-loka. And if we were to accept the other interpretation of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya we shall have to twist a lot of the meaning of the words ‘hears’ and ‘repeats’, for, ‘hearing’ and ‘repeating’ should mean hearing the Truth from a perfect Master and repeating it through one’s own reflections and meditations until at last one becomes a full jñānī. Then such a great soul shall come to enjoy the Brahma-rūpī loka; for, ‘the knower of Brahman becomes Brahman’ is a famous scriptural declaration.



य इमं परमं गुह्यं श्रावयेद् ब्रह्मसंसदि ।
प्रयतः श्राद्धकाले वा तदानन्त्याय कल्पते ॥
तदानन्त्याय कल्पत इति ॥ १७ ॥

इति काठकोपनिषदि प्रथमाध्यायः तृतीया वल्ली समाप्ता ॥

*ya imam paramam guhyam śrāvayed brahma-samsadi,
prayataḥ śrāddhakāle vā tadānantyāya kalpate.
tadānantyāya kalpata iti. (17)*

iti kāṭhakopaniṣadi prathamādhyaḥ tṛtīyā vallī samāptā.

यः – who; इमं – this (story); परमं – highest Supreme; गुह्यं – secret, mysterious; श्रावयेत् – (repeats) causes to be recited; ब्रह्मसंसदि – before an assembly of Brāhmaṇas; प्रयतः – with devotion (purity); श्राद्धकाले – at the time of śrāddha ceremony (of forefathers); वा – or; तदा – then; अनन्त्याय – for immortality; कल्पते – is made fit; तदानन्त्याय कल्पत इति – then he is fit to obtain immortality, thus

17. Whoever with devotion recites, before an assembly of Brāhmaṇas or at the time of śrāddha ceremony of forefathers, this highest secret, obtains thereby immortality, obtains immortality.

(Thus ends the third vallī of the first chapter)

anantyāya kalpate (obtains immortality) – This statement should not be confused by the students of Vedānta to mean what it directly says. Immortality cannot be gained by merely reading some textbooks, however great they may be in the presence of any assembly. Knowledge alone is

the cure for ignorance; light alone can end darkness. The vital experience lived through samādhi that one is, in one's real svarūpa, of the nature of the Self alone, can end the delusion created egocentric false identifications. It is only with the end of the ego can we end the dream sorrow of saṁsāra and end forever the endless whirl of births and deaths. Here immortality means only relative immortality which is the lot of the denizens of the heavens. Compared with the quick visitations of death in the plane of the mortal, the long periods of life extending over thousands of years and enjoyed by the enjoyers of heaven, the heavenly life can be favourably expressed as immortal.

With this glorification of Brahmavidyā, the first half of the Upaniṣad ends. It is the style of the Upaniṣads to repeat the last portion of the last mantra in each chapter to indicate the end of chapter. Thus we have here a repetition of the last two phrases to indicate the close of the chapter.

Thus, in this chapter, we have an elaborate scene of a fit student of Vedānta, Naciketā approaching a great and perfect Master of Brahmavidyā, Lord Death, with a burning doubt for elucidation. The chapter also contains some crisp statements in which the scriptural answer to the transcendental question has been very briefly hinted at, as it were, with many dots and dashes in between. The next chapter constituting in itself the entire second part of the Upaniṣad, gives us in detail the philosophical expositions on the nature of the Self.



ॐ सह नाववतु । सह नौ भुनक्तु ।
सह वीर्यं करवावहै ।
तेजस्वि नावधीतमस्तु । मा विद्विषावहै ॥
ॐ शान्तिः! शान्तिः!! शान्तिः!!!

*om saha nāvavatu, saha nau bhunaktu,
saha vīryam karavāvahai,
tejasvi nāvadhītamastu, mā vidviṣāvahai.
om śāntiḥ! śāntiḥ!! śāntiḥ!!!*

ॐ – symbol of the Para Brahman; सह – together; नौ – (both) us; अवतु – (let Him) protect; सह – together; नौ – (both) us; भुनक्तु – come to enjoy (bliss of Knowledge); सह – together; वीर्यं – effort; करवावहै – (let us both) do; तेजस्वि नौ – well studied; अधीतम्-अस्तु – what we study; मा – never; विद्विषावहै – quarrel with each other

*Let Him protect us both. May He bless us with bliss of Knowledge.
Let us exert together. May what we study, be well studied. May
we not hate (quarrel with) each other.*

Om Peace ! Peace !! Peace !!!





Chapter 2

द्वितीयोऽध्यायः

SECTION 4 – चतुर्थी वल्ली

The call for inner vision, leading to the recognition and attainment of unity.

पराञ्चि खानि व्यतृणत्स्वयंभू-
स्तस्मात्पराङ्पश्यति नान्तरात्मन् ।
कश्चिद्धीरः प्रत्यगात्मानमैक्ष-
दावृत्तचक्षुरमृतत्वमिच्छन् ॥ १ ॥

*parāñci khāni vyatṛṇat-svayambhū-
stasmāt-parāṇpaśyati na-antarātman,
kaścid-dhīraḥ pratyagātmānamaikṣa-
dāvṛttacakṣuramṛtatvamicchan. (1)*

पराञ्चि – going outwards; खानि – the senses; व्यतृणत् – created with defects, punished; स्वयंभूः – Brahmā (Creator, the self-existent God); तस्मात् – therefore; पराङ् – external universe; पश्यति – beholds; नान्तरात्मन् – not the internal Self; कश्चित् – some; धीरः – wise man; प्रत्यगात्मानम् – the Ātman within; ऐक्षत् – sees; आवृत्त – averted (turned inside); चक्षुः – eyes; अमृतत्वम् – immortality; इच्छन् – being desirous of

1. The Self-existent (Brahmā) created the senses with outgoing tendencies; therefore, man beholds the external universe and not the internal Self (Ātman). But only some wise man desirous of immortality, with eyes averted (turned within and with his senses turned away) from sensual objects, sees the Ātman within.

Being the opening stanza of the part of this Upaniṣad, we find herein not only an explanation of the sorrows and limitations of the sāmśārika world, but also hints on the path trodden by the wise in getting out of this world of tears.

No religion in the world is without its conception of an all-powerful controller and director in all forms of life, who is Himself the Creator. This God Principle is conceived of by all known prophets and sages, as self-born. The Śruti here is repeating this universal concept of God.

God, the Creator, has created the sense organs with a powerful tendency to go outward into the lustful fields of their own individual sense objects. Our ears can detect and listen to even the whispering songs of some distant bird chirping on the branch of a tree, through the din and roar of tramways and trucks, even in the busiest market centre! Our eyes can detect what our ears cannot hear; a gross example of this can be had in modern clubs where one understands what two friends are whispering between themselves, by merely watching the movement of their lips! Thus, all our sense organs ever keep on galloping outward towards their objects, but never can they be turned inwards to listen, see, smell, taste or touch what is happening within the body!

This portion of the text has been, more often than not, completely misunderstood both by casual readers and studious scholars. Śaṅkarācārya's commentary has been always the sanction for the misinterpretation. Śaṅkarācārya, no doubt, has interpreted it rightly as Parameśvara 'punished the senses' meaning Lord 'cursed the senses'. This is misconstrued as disrespect of philosophy towards the external world. No such implication has been even distantly echoed here. It only says that to those who are practising the higher yoga of meditation, the sense organs are a curse inasmuch as they refuse to be easily turned within. And without taking, at least once, an inward plunge, it is impossible for the indriyas to cognise the divinity which is the substratum everywhere for all objects.

Therefore, that the Lord cursed the sense organs is not to be understood literally; else the entire chapter would be advising a negative yoga of suppression and not a positive dharma – yoga of intelligent control and wise direction of our faculties towards self-perfection.

There are a rare few, who in themselves represent those who stand on the last landing ground on the stairs of evolution, and who, wishing to reach the very roof of existence, control their sense organs and thus turn their entire attention into their own within, where they hope to discover the well of Knowledge, and source of all life, the Self. Unless a seeker has come to feel an irresistible urge to know the nature of the Self and to experience, as the Self, the fullness of life, he will not find in himself the required sense of introvertedness nor the required amount of moral courage, intellectual conviction, mental heroism, psychological guts

and spiritual nerve to dam the outward flow of his indriyas and thus send the stream of attention in him back again to its very source, the Ātman. Indeed, such full-blown men are rare in any generation.

It is evident how Lord Death has, in this beautiful stanza, summarised the cause for the disease of death and also prescribed the specific for its remedy. No wonder then if there is no other stanza in all our scriptures which is so often quoted from platforms, from pulpits, in courts and in temples.



पराचः कामाननुयन्ति बाला-
स्ते मृत्योर्यन्ति विततस्य पाशम् ।
अथ धीरा अमृतत्वं विदित्वा
ध्रुवमध्रुवेष्विह न प्रार्थयन्ते ॥ २ ॥

*parācaḥ kāmānanuyanti bālā-
ste mṛtyoryanti vitatasya pāśam,
atha dhīrā amṛtatvaṁ viditvā
dhruvamadhruveṣviha na prārthayante. (2)*

पराचः – external; कामान् – pleasures; अनुयन्ति – pursue; बालाः – children; ते – they; मृत्योः – of death; यन्ति – fall into, go; विततस्य – widespread; पाशम् – snares; अथ – but, so; धीराः – the wise men; अमृतत्वं – immortality; विदित्वा – having known; ध्रुवम् – what is eternal; अध्रुवेषु – among the mortal things; इह – in this world; न प्रार्थयन्ते – do not desire

2. The ignorant (childlike) pursue the external pleasures (and so) they fall into the snares of the widespread death. But the wise do not desire (anything) in this world, having known what is eternally immortal in the midst of all non-eternals.

The forgetfulness of our divine nature is ignorance. This ignorance (avidyā) manifests itself in the mental plane as desires. Prompted by these desires, the mind whips the sense organs to run their errands in the world of their objects which together are called the 'karmas' or the 'actions' by us. It is the 'ignorance' in the plane of the Spirit that gets transformed into 'desire' in the mental plane, which itself is again expressed as 'action' in the outer world of objects. Ignorance, desire and action – these three are technically termed as the 'knots of the heart' (hṛdaya-granthi) in Vedānta. It is this set of knots that causes the actions; and man, in order to reap the results of his actions, is compelled to take various new forms and independent lives, in varied circumstances of uncertain joys and endless sorrows.

In these two mantras we have a clear indication of two great obstacles that stand in our way to the realisation of the Self – (1) the natural tendency of the sense organs to run outward eloping with the entire wealth of attention that man is capable of and (2) the desire for enjoyments of the objects of this world and the next.

The majority belong to this type of existence. They are, viewed from the highest standards of spiritual perfection, as mere children in their growth and evolution. They fail to recognise the possibility of an existence greater in scope

and diviner in contents, where the sense organs stop their rambling into the pits of sorrow, wherein they generally revel in an ordinary man living in his day-to-day delusions. Indeed, it is only too true when the Śrutis classify such men as mere children.

Haunted by desires and goaded by the mind, the sense organs vainly trot the paths of their objects, seeking for a perfect joy which is continuous and unbroken. Man can be satisfied only with the eternal. Finiteness always despairs man. Seeking the Infinite, in our ignorance, we exhaust ourselves among the sense objects. Tired and weary, fatigued and exhausted with the futile hunt, each of us falls prostrate soon to breathe our last! Hence, Śruti declares that such childish men who have not come to an adult's discrimination, will fall ultimately into the fruits of delusions, the widespread snares of death (finiteness).

Against these men of childhood, Śruti contrasts the wise men who live a life of sleepless discrimination and Knowledge. The wise men maintain a vigilant discrimination between the Real and the unreal, the True and the false. They naturally escape from the suicidal urges of a deluded mind. They do not covet the unstable, the perishable, the finite sense objects, for they want nothing but the Immortal and the Infinite.

Since the inner enemies are the ignorance, desire and action, the wise, through an intelligent control of their actions, earn for themselves a state of desirelessness. And since desires are manifestations of the deep seated ignorance, in the state of desirelessness there is, naturally, an end of all ignorance. When ignorance is ended, desire and action,

which are but the same ignorance in different forms, are also ended. With the end of ignorance, Knowledge comes to shine forth. avidyā is ended in jñāna. And such jñānīs are here termed as the 'wise'. They naturally, would never yearn for the fleeting sense objects of the world for their own sake as any ordinary deluded saṃsārin; also at the same time they will not detaste anything, because to them everything is but glorious manifestation of divine Self.



येन रूपं रसं गन्धं शब्दान्स्पर्शाश्च मैथुनान् ।
एतेनैव विजानाति किमत्र परिशिष्यते ॥
एतद्वै तत् ॥ ३ ॥

*yena rūpaṃ rasaṃ gandhaṃ śabdān-sparśāṃśca maithunān,
etenaiva vijānāti kimatra pariśiṣyate.
etad-vai tat. (3)*

येन – by which (Ātman); रूपं – form (light); रसं – taste; गन्धं – smell; शब्दान् – sounds; स्पर्शा – touches; च – and; मैथुनान् – dualistic joys (sexual contacts); एतेन – by these; एव – even; विजानाति – cognises; किम् – what; अत्र – in this world; परिशिष्यते – remains; एतत् – this is; वै – verily; तत् – That (Ātman)

3. That Ātman by which man cognises form, taste, smell, sounds, and the sexual joys... what is there unknowable to that Ātman in this world? This is verily That (Ātman thou hast wanted to know).

This mantra must be quite clear to those of you who had been following clearly our discussions upon the *Kenopaniṣad*. In

fact this mantra is a summary of the entire line of arguments raised in *Kenopaniṣad* and the conclusions reached therein.

We found in the *Kenopaniṣad* that the instrument eye, in itself, is not competent to cognise the external objects. If the eyes were to see of their own accord, then if I were to pluck out my eyes and place them on the table, they should be able to continue seeing things by themselves; this we know is absurd. Again a dead man with intact eyeballs may be staring with his open eyes but we, from our practical knowledge of life, know for certain that he can see nothing. From the above it is amply clear that the human eye is only an instrument to see and that it is to be used by a seer within.

For a close analogy we shall take the case of a telescope in use. A telescope by itself can observe no movement of the planets! It is the observer behind the eyepiece of the telescope who watches the heavens through the instrument. Similarly, the human organs of knowledge are only instruments through which smell, sound, taste, form and touch impulses can be received by an intelligent entity that rules within and makes use of these five instruments.

That power within each of us, that is the seer behind our eyes, the listener behind our ears, the smeller behind the nose, the taster in the tongue, and the feeler in the skin, is the soul of man, the *Ātman*, the Self.

This conclusion, already arrived at in the *Kenopaniṣad*, is now inimitably summarised in this mantra by Lord Death, when he says, 'This is *Ātman* by which man cognises form, taste, smell, sound and sexual joy.'

maithunān (sense enjoyments) – The use of the word in its plural must necessarily give us the hint that it is not sexual pleasure alone that is meant but it covers all enjoyments that we receive from the external world through our instruments of sense knowledge.

Ātman being thus the vital intelligence that presides over all the sense instruments, and since all our knowledge regarding the world of objects is only through the report of these five great agents, it is quite appropriate to state that there is nothing unknowable for that Ātman in this world. Again we shall find, later on in the same Upaniṣad that the supreme Reality is, by nature, Knowledge Absolute.

We may here conveniently remember that the eager seeker in Naciketā reached the doors of his preceptor, Lord Death, raising a question or doubt as to ‘What is that which is beyond dharma and adharma, beyond the cause and effect, and beyond the past and the future?’ That question is being now directly answered. The Life Centre in us that controls and directs all our physical, mental and intellectual activities is the divine Spark of Truth, the Self. It being eternal and infinite in Its nature, It must necessarily be beyond the comprehension of language to define It as such. So then, conforming himself to the method of the Upaniṣads, Lord Death, through the activities of the dead inert matter envelopments around us, is pointing out to a vital and dynamic presence of divinity, which is in us. Thereafter, he explains to Naciketā that ‘This is verily That’.

In our ordinary life we indicate objects with the pronouns ‘this’ and ‘that’ when one is nearer to us than the

other; the nearer one is always indicated by the pronoun 'this'. When we say 'that' chair and 'this' pen, it clearly shows that the chair is far away and the pen is nearer to us. Again, the pen becomes farther removed from us when it is compared with our own shirt; then we say 'that' pen and this 'shirt'. Similarly, we may use the expression as 'that' body and 'this' mind; 'that' mind and 'this' intellect and so on, within ourselves, when we compare our own body with our own mind, and our own mind with our own intellect. Naturally, it becomes evident that the Self, which is the core of ourselves being the most intimate part in us, is rightly indicated by the term 'this'.

Here the Upaniṣad says, 'This is That' – meaning the individual Self is the supreme Self. Besides this interpretation of Vedānta of the oneness of the individual Self and the total Self, we may here, accepting the dramatic background of the Upaniṣad, explain the passage as 'That is the Ātman thou hast wanted to know'.



स्वप्नान्तं जागरितान्तं चोभौ येनानुपश्यति ।
महान्तं विभुमात्मानं मत्वा धीरो न शोचति ॥ ४ ॥

*svapnāntaṁ jāgaritāntaṁ cobhau yenānupaśyati,
mahāntaṁ vibhumātmānaṁ matvā dhīro na śocati. (4)*

स्वप्नान्तं – within the dream; जागरितान्तं – objects in the waking state; च – and; उभौ – both; येन – by which; अनुपश्यति – perceives; महान्तं – the great; विभुम् – omnipresent, all-pervading; आत्मानं

– the Ātman; मत्वा – having known, realised; धीरः – the wise man; न शोचति – grieves no more

4. The mumukṣu, when he knows 'That' by which he perceives all objects in dream or in waking state is the great omnipresent Ātman, grieves no more.

Here Lord Death is slightly elaborating upon the greatest significance and the practical application in life of the knowledge of Ātman in us. In these days of skepticism and lustful madness for profits and material hoardings, the educated class of Hindus all over the country asks sarcastically, 'Of what use is this wonderful knowledge of Ātman which the Vedānta preaches? Can it set us on our progress? Can it cure the food scarcity in the country or bring about universal peace and joy?'

Though one is tempted to curse this generation for its unintelligent approach to religion, we must at once admit that there was, probably, never in the history of the world a generation born so sensitive as ours and so sincerely seeking to establish communal peace and universal brotherhood, as ourselves.

Here in the stanza, we have a sufficiently broad hint as to the mental state, the physical condition and the intellectual attitude of a seeker who has come to grasp this true great knowledge and fix his own identity with the real factor, pure Consciousness, that lies in him.

We have already found in the previous mantra that the world of the waking state, experienced through our

five senses of knowledge, is made possible only because of the vital Intelligence, the Life Force, that presides in our body.

If life were not in any particular body, however great and noble that Mahātmā might have been, however intelligent the scientist, however emotional the poet, however great genius the painter, none of them would any more function, when once the life has ceased to preside over the body! Thus, we have already found out that the intelligent entity, the Ātman, is the illuminator of our awareness of the waking state world during the periods of our wakeful existence.

There could be none who has not yet experienced what a dream is. Now, supposing, you take up a book in hand; how do you read it? Is not the presence of some light necessary for the illumination of the letters and words in the book so that you may read? Supposing it were night, you might read in the moonlight; in the dark fortnight by starlight; in cloudy, starless, pitch darkness you may bring the light of fire to light up the letters. In short, without some sort of light we cannot see objects. Yet we all 'see' our daily dreams. The dreamworld certainly exists only within ourselves; and since we 'see' them, and they are objects, we surely must need to have some sort of a light to illumine for us the inner objects in our mental region. Lord Death explains that the dreamworld is also illumined for us by the light of the same divine Intelligence that presides in us as our real nature.

One and the same Consciousness illumines for us not only the world of our waking state but it also lights up for us the experiences of our dream state.

The goal of life, the highest achievement of man, is to get himself completely detached from his false identifications with his body, mind and intellect, and come to rediscover himself to be nothing other than that divine Spark, which is the director and controller of all the activities, manifested in Its outer envelopments!

mahāntam vibhum (great, omnipresent) – In the final experience of God-consciousness, the perfected one establishes his identity with his soul and thereby at once realises his own nature as great and omnipresent; for, we have already found that the individual Self is the supreme Self.

Having realised this factor, this Truth, the Realised Saint grieves no more. Sense of limitation is the mother of desires in the human heart, desires raise the storm clouds of whistling thoughts to shriek through a noisy bosom, and drive the sense organs to gallop out into the muddy mesh work of sense objects. In the hustle and tussle to achieve a satisfaction in each of our desires, we strive and struggle and in the end find ourselves in a vale of tears. Even when the desires are fulfilled we, alas! discover that the joy of success we expected to enjoy is not there! When the desires are not fulfilled, in tearful disappointments, men grieve and sigh, make their life a burning avenue of wretchedness. Thus, desires ultimately give us nothing but sorrow whether they are fulfilled or not.

Desire, we found, can rise only when there is a sense of imperfection in us. Soon after a full dinner, at least for some time, even the worst of gluttons will not desire for something to eat; as for the time being there is no lack of food within him.

Soon, after a couple of hours, he may desire for some light tiffin! Here he has started feeling a sense of incompleteness, hence the desire.

When a perfect human being who has ended all his misunderstandings about himself and has come to the knowledge that he is the supreme Awareness in himself, he, in his absolute sense of perfection, shall desire no more for anything that the world of the sense objects can give. Such a Perfected One is a God-man upon earth. This is the goal pointed out by the greatest of all religions known to man, Hinduism. The religion of Vedānta calls upon man to rediscover himself to be nothing short of God himself. And when a mortal has fully Realised and come to live continuously the God-consciousness, to him, certainly, no sorrows can approach.

If there be but a generation of such supermen, will it not most satisfactorily solve all our problems – political, economic, cultural and religious? In fact even when a man has just begun to live the life of the Spirit, all the above mentioned problems of life will recede as though at the waving of a magic wand! Is there anything, then, more practical than the religion of Vedānta?



य इमं मध्वदं वेद आत्मानं जीवमन्तिकात् ।
ईशानं भूतभव्यस्य न ततो विजुगुप्सते ॥
एतद्वै तत् ॥ ५ ॥

*ya imaṁ madhvadam veda ātmānaṁ jīvamantikāt,
īśānaṁ bhūtabhavyasya na tato vijugupsate.
etad-vai tat. (5)*

यः – who; इमं – this; मध्वदं – the enjoyer of honey; वेद – knows; आत्मानं – this Ātman; जीवम् – sustainer of life; अन्तिकात् – proximately, very near; ईशानं – the Lord; भूतभव्यस्य – of the past and future; न – no more; ततः – thereafter; विजुगुप्सते – he fears; एतत् – this is; वै – verily; तत् – That

5. He (mumukṣu) who knows this Ātman, the enjoyer of honey, the sustainer of life and the Lord of the past and the future, as very near... he fears no more thereafter. This is verily That.

Not only does such a Perfected One go beyond the source of sobs and tears, but shall, says this mantra, reach the domain of fearlessness.

madhvadam (the enjoyer of honey) – Honey here stands for the good fruits of meritorious acts performed by the ego-centric jīvas. The Ātman, pure Consciousness, is said to be here the eater of honey; meaning He is the enjoyer of all the good luck that accrues to one as a result of noble acts of kindness, mercy and love performed in earlier states of existence.

This statement, in fact, if understood literally, would go against the grains of the very philosophy of Vedānta, as Ātman is neither an enjoyer nor a doer. In case we accept the Ātman to be an enjoyer, in pure Consciousness which is

one without a second, how can there be the 'enjoyed' and the 'enjoying' separate from the eternal enjoyer?

Ātman is the intelligence that illumines for us both the acts of commissions and omissions, meritorious or otherwise. It is again the light principle that illumines for us both our joys and sorrows. The sun may illumine equally a scene of murder at one place and a scene of a great yajña at another place; but the sun never gets defiled by the blood nor purified by the mantras. Similarly, the Ātma-caitanya is only a witnessing light of pure Intelligence lending Its consciousness to all acts committed by the egocentric, vain jīva during its self-forgetful delusory transactions in life. But here the Upaniṣad calls the Ātman as an enjoyer of the fruits of the good acts, only in its conditioned aspect. We have already found that the body-mind-intellect equipment in itself has no life of its own, it being made up of mere dead matter. It is the Spirit in us that lends to these coverings a simulacrum of life.

To make this point clearer let us take an example. The glass bulb or the filament has no capacity in itself to illumine objects in a dark room. But when a required quantity of electricity is allowed to flow through the same filament, the bulb gains a special capacity to illumine the objects of the room. In fact electricity as such does not illumine the room; it is the glowing filament in the bulb that gives us the light. Yet, don't we in our transactions say that the room is lit by electricity? It is exactly in a similar way we have here the statement that Ātman is the enjoyer of the fruits of actions; Ātman as conditioned by the mind, intellect and body, is actually what is meant here.

One who realises his Ātman 'henceforth fears no more'. Where there is rāga (attachment) there bhaya (fear) and krodha (anger) coexist. When, as we have seen in the last mantra, a Perfected Soul has reached the state of desirelessness, he has no more attachments with any particular objects of the world, and, naturally, there cannot be in him any sense of fear. He has, in his true wisdom realised the shadow nothingness of his dream body, and so does not fear even death which to him is only an escape from his self-created body cocoon! He has no attachments even with his body. He is perfectly above all body consciousness. This verily is that Brahman, which thou hast asked for.



यः पूर्वं तपसो जातमद्भ्यः पूर्वमजायत ।
गुहां प्रविश्य तिष्ठन्तं यो भूतेभिर्व्यपश्यत ॥
एतद्वै तत् ॥ ६ ॥

*yaḥ pūrvam tapaso jātam adbhyaḥ pūrvamajāyata,
guhām praviśya tiṣṭhantam yo bhutebhir-vyapaśyata.
etad-vai tat. (6)*

यः – who; पूर्वं – in the beginning; तपसः – tapas of (Brahmā);
जातम् – was born; अद्भ्यः पूर्वम् – before the waters (i.e. the
five elements); अजायत – was born; गुहां – cave of heart; प्रविश्य
– having entered; तिष्ठन्तं – he who dwells; यः – who; भूतेभिः –
within the five elements (body); व्यपश्यत – beholds (realises);
एतत् – this is; वै – verily; तत् – That

6. *He (mumukṣu) who beholds Him (Hiraṇyagarbha) seated within the five elements, who was born of tapas (of Brahmā), who was created before the waters, who entered the cave of the heart and stayed there (that mumukṣu verily sees Brahman). This is verily 'That' (Brahman, which thou hast asked for).*

The theory of creation is a knotty problem in the literature of the Upaniṣads. Modern book-grazers and hasty students of the Upaniṣads come to the fantastic conclusion that intuitive understanding is not true, since these sacred books have self-contradicting theories to explain the how and whence of the world's creation. No two Upaniṣads concur among themselves as regards the details of the process by which creation had taken place. Each Upaniṣad explains to us in its own inimitable style a method and a process; each of them in itself has a charm of its own and can give the student a convincing explanation quite satisfactorily, till the same student comes to read and understand a totally different process expounded by another Upaniṣad.

The Upaniṣad ṛṣis, in their firm understanding of the Truth, could not take the problem of creation with any seriousness at all. They knew, in their wisdom, that this manifested world of names and forms is but a delusion created by the human mind. The world has only as much reality as our dreams have. But the ṛṣis knew at once that to the seeker who had approached them, steeped as he was in the impressions created by his own delusions, in his early stages, the world is absolutely real. Each student is to be delicately and softly raised to the higher realms of knowledge from the state in which he finds himself at the time of his approach to the Guru.

Again no two students are of the same temperament, culture, attitude or aptitude. The Teacher learns the nature of each student through patient and close observations and classifies him according to his temperament.

The great ṛṣis explain to each type, a particular myth explanation for the myth world! The authors of the Upaniṣads were not in the least serious about their explanations of a non-existent world. Whatever be the explanations given and processes elaborated, to explain the creation of the world, each Master had to lead the student ultimately to a state of pure Consciousness, viewed from the absolute nature of which, the creation had actually never taken place, except in the deluded jīva's own mind!!

If we were to explain the fallacy of the snake in the rope, we too would adopt an explanation according to the condition of the bitten, and shall modify our own explanations when the victim of 'snake bite' changes to be another individual of a different temperament and belonging to a different class of culture.

In this mantra we have just some hasty cross references to the process of creation which have been much more elaborately dealt with in other Upaniṣads.

Brahman or the supreme Reality in the (samaṣṭi) macro-cosmic aspect is Hiranyagarbha and in the (vyaṣṭi) micro-cosmic aspect is the jīva. He who knows Brahman through both these aspects is a true knower of Reality.

adbhyaḥ pūrvam (prior to waters) – The Hiranyagarbha or the total mind was born prior to the ‘five elements’. Here water stands for all the ‘five elements’; ākāśa (space) is a grosser manifestation from the total mind.

tapasaḥ (by penance or of knowledge) – There are passages in the different Upaniṣads where the processes of creation are explained; one of them is ‘the Supreme willed Himself to be many and many came or became¹’. It is this theory that is echoed in this mantra.

In short, the mantra says that a seeker finally realises the supreme Reality, the eternal factor, both in the microcosm and in the macrocosm (vyaṣṭi and samaṣṭi). Brahman appears as jīva through the conditioning of māyā.

When the conditionings drop off the Hiranyagarbha and jīva, they become identical with the transcendental Brahman. ‘This is verily That’ which you had enquired for.



या प्राणेन संभवत्यदितिर्देवतामयी ।
गुहां प्रविश्य तिष्ठन्ती या भूतेभिर्व्यजायत ॥
एतद्वै तत् ॥ ७ ॥

*yā prāṇena sambhavatyaditir-devatāmayī,
guhām praviśya tiṣṭhantīm yā bhūtebhir-vyajāyata.
etad-vai tat. (7)*

¹ Refer Swamiji’s discourses on *Taitirīya-upaniṣad*–2.6

यः – who; प्राणेन – along with prāṇa; संभवति – is born; अदितिः – the enjoyer; देवतामयी – soul of all devatās (gods); गुहां – the cavity of the heart; प्रविश्य – having entered; तिष्ठन्ती – who abides therein; यः – who; भूतेभिः – with the five elements; व्यजायत – was born; एतत् – this is; वै – verily; तत् – That

7. (He – Brahman) who was born as Prāṇa (Hiraṇyagarbha), the soul of all devatās, who was born as Aditi – the enjoyer – (Hiraṇyagarbha) entering into the cave of the heart abided therein, who was born with the five elements, this is verily ‘That’ (Brahman which thou hast asked for).

Here the word ‘prāṇa’ stands for Hiraṇyagarbha; thus the meaning would be, he who is born in the form of prāṇa or as Hiraṇyagarbha.

devatāmayī (in the form of gods; the soul of the gods) – Here devatā (god) stands for the presiding deities of the sense organs. The prāṇas (vital airs) are the life essence in the perception power of the indriyas.

Aditi (one who eats, the eater) – Hiraṇyagarbha is called here as ‘Aditi’ because he is the sole enjoyer of the whole universe, as he is the macrocosmic life or the cosmic prāṇa or the cosmic intelligence. All the joys enjoyed by every living form are a joy registered in the lived, in the cosmic mind or the total mind.

This is verily that Brahman (which thou hast asked for).



अरण्योर्निहितो जातवेदा गर्भ इव सुभृतो गर्भिणीभिः ।
दिवे दिव ईड्यो जागृवद्भिर्हविष्मद्भिर्मनुष्येभिरग्निः ॥
एतद्वै तत् ॥ ८ ॥

*aranyaornihito jātavedā garbha iva subhṛto garbhīṇībhiḥ,
dive diva īdya jāgṛvadbhir-haviṣmadbhir-manuṣyebhiragniḥ.
etad-vai tat. (8)*

अरण्योः – two pieces of wood, that is, fire sticks; निहितः – lodged; जातवेदाः – omniscient (fire); गर्भः – foetus; इव – like; सुभृतः – well preserved, well nourished; गर्भिणीभिः – by pregnant women; दिवे दिव – day by day; ईड्यः – adorable, worshipful; जागृवद्भिः – by awakened men; हविष्मद्भिः – by the sacrificial offerers to the sacrificial fire; मनुष्येभिः – by men; अग्निः – God of Fire; एतत् – this is; वै – verily; तत् – That

8. As the foetus is well preserved by the pregnant women, the omniscient fire that, lodged within two pieces of wood (fire sticks), is worshipped day after day (both) by awakened men¹ and by the sacrificial offerers.² This is indeed That.

The Brahman of the jñānīs and the ‘fire’ of the householders are the same in the sense that all worship reaches the same source of all blessings, the Supreme.

In Vaidika sacrifices, fire is lit not from any glowing coal or from any other scientific contrivance, as a cigarette lighter or a matchbox. The auspicious fire is generated for installation in sacrifices by rubbing two pieces of wood in

¹ jñānīs or sannyāsins

² karmīs or householders

a wooden cuphole scooped out in another piece of wood. The rod is pressed into the hole by one ṛtvika and another Brāhmaṇa with a piece of string wound round the vertical rod, makes it revolve continuously in its wooden cup. The wooden piece with which the revolving rod is pressed down, that upper stick is called the 'uttarāraṇi' and the lower wooden block (stick) is called the 'adharāraṇi'.

In the adharāraṇi, near the edge of the cup, is placed some cotton. The wood pieces rubbing against each other generate heat by friction and it is sufficient to set fire to the cotton pieces. This fire is then tended in the havana-kunḍa. The fire, once lit, is never allowed to die off but is very carefully nourished and kept ablaze all through the sacrifice until the conclusion of it in the pūrṇāhuti (total oblation). The motherly tenderness, devotion and care with which the ṛtvika preserves the fire is beautifully brought out by comparing it with the foetus preserved in the womb of a pregnant woman.

The same Brahman who is worshipped by sages in the heart through meditation is worshipped by householders as Agni (Fire) through sacrifices.

The seekers worshipped the Supreme through meditations upon the significances of Om. The householders worshipped the same Reality that is present in the core of its own manifestation, the Fire. Worship being an act in the gross plane of sense objects, it needs some prop which, for the sage is provided in the symbol 'Om', and for the householder in this symbol, the Fire. If the names and forms in Om and Fire are removed, the Upaniṣad says that the Truth which

is worshipped by the sage and the householder is one and the same; and this is verily 'That' which thou hast asked for.



यतश्चोदेति सूर्योऽस्तं यत्र च गच्छति ।
तं देवाः सर्वे अर्पितास्तदु नात्येति कश्चन ॥
एतद्वै तत् ॥ ९ ॥

*yataścodeti sūryo'staṁ yatra ca gacchati,
taṁ devāḥ sarve arpitās-tadu nātyeti kaścana.
etad-vai tat. (9)*

यतः – from which; च – and; उदेति – rises; सूर्यः – the sun; अस्तं गच्छति – merges; यत्र – into which; च – and; तं – in That; देवाः – the devas, gods; सर्वे – all; अर्पिताः – depend, are fixed; तत् – in that; उ – verily; न कश्चन – none; अत्येति – goes beyond, transcends; एतत् – this is; वै – verily; तत् – That

9. And That, from which the sun rises, and into which it merges, on That, all the devatās depend and no one goes beyond. This is indeed That.

All finite things have been observed to have a beginning and an end. Transient beings are born, and everything that is born must necessarily die out after a period of time. Modern astronomers also have come to the same conclusion that the sun, the moon and the stars, including this globe of ours, are things born and so they will, at different periods of time, disappear into nothingness.

Long before our modern astronomers started their game, in the dim dawn of the history of modern man, as known today to the European thinkers, the Āryan Masters had built a heaven on the plains of Ganga and helped themselves into a generation of supreme human culture and godly civilisation. Their greatest achievement in thought left to us for study is the science of all sciences, the Brahmavidyā, as discussed in the Upaniṣads. The ṛṣis of the Upaniṣads here declare that the vital Truth from which the sun had risen at the time of its manifestation and the factor into which it would merge when it withdraws its manifestation, is the state of pure Existence, which is nothing but a homogeneous mass of pure Consciousness. Here, the word ‘sun’ is a representative noun, indicating in itself the entire world of finite objects.

All the devas depend on that eternal Absolute, the state of pure Existence. The word ‘devas’ here does not mean the denizens of the heavens, the godly creatures. It only means the five fundamental elements. They are called ‘devas’ because they are considered in Vedānta as the presiding deities of the five sense organs. The modern college educated children of ignorance, in their incorrigible vanities of wisdom (vijñāna), might easily laugh at this idea of presiding deities in our sense organs. This kind of blasphemy we hear of nowadays so often that it would be worthwhile for us to go into the question for a moment and see if there be any justification for such a belief.

Here Chinmaya may confess that he was the greatest blasphemer of all such statements in our scriptures! When ignorance strides forth to act and play the part of wisdom

such atrocities must necessarily come to be enacted! Our European readers need not feel aghast at these strong expressions. These expressions can be exaggerations only to those of us who have forgotten how the Christian world persecuted and killed the greatest thinker and astronomer of the times, when he discovered and declared that the sun is stationary and that it is the earth that moves – a statement against the then biblical declarations!

Let us try to understand the import of the statement made by the Upaniṣad in the light of the scientific discoveries of our own times. The sense organ, ear, is declared to be presided over by ākāśa (space). Our modern scientists will admit that sound can be created and conveyed only in space; if there were no space, no sound would have been generated or conveyed. The world that lies beyond the concept of space known to all of us is the world of sleep, where, certainly sound has no entry. Viewed thus, what is wrong if the great Masters of the Upaniṣad had declared that the ‘ear is presided over by space?’

In a dark room, for all our struggle to ‘see’, we shall see nothing but darkness. When the room is lit we see the objects. Thus, in the presence of the objects, the eyes cannot see them except when they are blessed by the principle of light. In short, only in a medium of light can the instrument of eye function, except in negligible instances where some animals can see in darkness too! Such being the case what is wrong if the ṛṣis of the Upaniṣads, in the language of their era, describe the instrument eye to be presided over by the visible source of all light, the sun?

Thus, when approached in a spirit of sympathetic understanding, research and discovery, we shall find, clothed in the frocks of Vaidika frills and ancient ribbons, there revels eternally the deathless eve of Truth who is for all times and for all people! If the modern educated Hindus reach the doors of their own scripture only to laugh at and to ridicule it, let them remember that they are laughing at their own ignorance and lack of understanding.

Thus the mantra clearly declares that all the five great elements depend entirely upon the supreme Self, the pure Existence. The deities of the five sense organs, 'the gods' depend upon the supreme Reality, the pure Consciousness, as the spokes of wheel upon the hub of it. But for the central hub, we all know for certain, that the different spokes can neither maintain themselves nor function their own little part effectively in strengthening the wheel!

This Truth, which is the substratum for the fundamental elements, is That which you have been asking for.



यदेवेह तदमुत्र यदमुत्र तदन्विह ।
मृत्योः स मृत्युमाप्नोति य इह नानेव पश्यति ॥ १० ॥

*yadeveha tadamutra yadamutra tadanviha,
mr̥tyoḥ sa mr̥tyumāpnoti ya iha nāneva paśyati. (10)*

यत् – what; एव – indeed; इह – here; तत् – that; अमुत्र – there; यत् – what is; अमुत्र – there; तत् अनु – the same (according to that); इह – is here; मृत्योः – from death; सः – he; मृत्युम् – to death; आप्नोति

– proceeds, meets; यः – who; इह – here; नानेव – as different; पश्यति – beholds

10. What is indeed here (visible as the world) the same is there (invisible as Brahman); and what is there, the same is here. He proceeds from death to death who beholds here difference (between Brahman and the world).

All the different waves are but the ocean; the ocean alone is. Whether it be at its hood, or at its length or at its tail, the real substance behind the serpent in the rope is always the reality of the rope alone. In fact the waves are nothing but the ocean; the serpent is nothing but the rope. The mirage is nothing but the desert!

In this sense, the mantra is here kindly explaining to us that, in fact, there is no difference between the supreme Reality and the essential Reality behind the world of delusory names and forms. Where there is no Truth, there cannot be a manifested world of objects. What we see behind all the seeming delusions is the eternal, all-pervading Truth. The story may be a tragedy, a comedy or musical extravaganza, but whatever be the theme and quality of the film displayed, the audience can have for themselves a continuous idea of the story only when the play of light and shade is supported by an unchanging spotless screen; where there is no screen, there no story can possibly be depicted.

In short, the knower of the Self, after his supreme moment of life, the moment of illumination, cannot visualise the world without a dynamic awareness of the Truth

Principle that ever supports and governs it. After his gaining the Knowledge, his vision changes, and thereafter even the most heinous crime is, to that God-man, only a manifestation of the all-pervading Self. He neither condemns nor extols any action. To him all actions are false; but at once they are to him, solid reminders of the central Truth.

The uninitiated youth may find this statement too thick to swallow. We shall try to grasp its serious inner import through a vivid example. Don't we find doting fathers glorifying their children as the most ideal kids that had ever come to live on the surface of this globe, even when they have proved themselves to be urchins of the worst type, mischievous, unruly and uncultured? If we observe these fathers more minutely we shall find them to be intelligent critics of all the children! Similarly, the God-man, having had once the glorious vision of the all-pervading beauty, attains the eternal perfection of the Self. Thereafter, even in the midst of sorrows and pains he experiences but the Self's joys and bliss!

To the Realised Saint, in his transcendental vision, 'whatever is here, that is there; what is there, the same is here.' If the statement be yet beyond the grasp of your understanding, it is only because the statement relates itself to a standpoint which is too high even for your mind and intellect to soar up in their fat grossness.

After all, why should one try to gain this supreme vision of oneness? Of what benefit is it for the mortal? These and similar questions might rise up in the mind of the unprepared and the uninitiated.

The Śruti kindly answers all such possible doubts in the minds of her students. She says that he who has not achieved this great, grand mission of life and has not come to have free darśana of the eternal Presence everywhere and at all times, such a wretch, grovelling in the world of plurality, shall fall repeatedly into the whirl of births and deaths.

The hint is that he who has come to experience the state of oneness, which is the state of godhood, shall never slip back more into the endless wheel of pains of saṁsāra and continue the agonising shuttle race between repeated births and deaths.



मनसैवेदमाप्तव्यं नेह नानास्ति किञ्चन ।
मृत्योः स मृत्युं गच्छति य इह नानेव पश्यति ॥ ११ ॥

*manasaivedam-āptavyam neha nānāsti kiñcana,
mr̥tyoḥ sa mr̥tyuṁ gacchati ya iha nāneva paśyati. (11)*

मनसा – by mind; एव – alone; इदम् – this; आप्तव्यं – could be obtained (realised); नेह – not here; नाना – difference; अस्ति – there is; किञ्चन – anything; मृत्योः – from death; सः – he; मृत्युं – to death; गच्छति – goes; यः – who; इह – here; नानेव – as different; पश्यति – sees

11. *By mind alone could this (Brahman) be obtained (realised); then there is no difference here at all. He, who sees any difference here, goes from death to death.*

As we have seen earlier, the Āryans' practical mind is not satisfied by a mere statement of an ideology, however wonderful and great it may be. No philosophy is acceptable to the Hindus, unless it also contains 'a way of living' by which he can realise the ideals glorified by that philosophy. Satisfying this inner urge, essential to the Āryan character and national temperament, the Upaniṣad immediately after her statement of a philosophical Truth, as explained in the previous mantra hastens to give her disciples the path by which they can realise this vision of Truth. Mind alone is the vehicle for God-realisation. This statement of the Śruti may seem to contradict the previous assertions that the Self is realised on transcending the mind and the intellect.

This is no contradiction. When she says that mind is the only vehicle, she only means that the mind is to be trained through its controlled and regulated application to minimise its activities to a zero, when it dies off itself. The process of 'mind annihilation' is to be achieved not through a murder but through a suicide! In fact, however great the Master be, and however powerful the scriptures be, they cannot bring about the final ending of the mind unless the seeker is ready to end it himself and by his own efforts.

manasaivedam-āptavyam (by mind alone could this be obtained) – Meditation is the process by which the mind, soaring over the summit of spiritual enquiries, loses itself into nothingness. Like the mythological bird, phoenix, which, singing its death song, falls down to die in a mass of fire, when out of its own ashes rises up another young one, the seeker's mind also singing the song of meditation burns itself

away in its own self-lit pyre and out of its own ashes, rises up to a new faculty called 'intuition', which is the instrument with which the seeker ultimately cognises the Self. When the mind has thus ended through meditation, and the Self has become fully aware of Itself, then there is no difference here at all.

For purposes of certainty and emphasis of assertion, Śruti is here repeating dire consequences which one will have to face if one were not smart enough to walk the path of Truth and fully succeed in reaching the goal of life in this very birth. 'He shall' promises the Śruti, 'go from death to death who sees differences here'.



अङ्गुष्ठमात्रः पुरुषो मध्य आत्मनि तिष्ठति ।
ईशानो भूतभव्यस्य न ततो विजुगुप्सते ॥
एतद्वै तत् ॥ १२ ॥

*aṅguṣṭhamātraḥ puruṣo madhya ātmani tiṣṭhati,
īśāno bhūtabhavyasya na tato vijugupsate.¹
etad-vai tat. (12)*

अङ्गुष्ठमात्रः – size of a thumb; पुरुषः – the person (Puruṣa); मध्ये – in the middle; आत्मनि – of the body; तिष्ठति – resides; ईशानः – Lord; भूतभव्यस्य – of the past and future; न – no more; ततः – hence forward (after realising Him); विजुगुप्सते – fear; एतत् – this is; वै – verily; तत् – That

¹ The second line is repeated in *ibid.* verse – 4.5

12. *The person (Puruṣa) of the size of a thumb, resides in the middle of the body as the Lord of the past and the future, and henceforth (after knowing Him) fears no more. This is indeed That.*

The Śruti declares that a human life fully flowers itself into an adorable success only when the individual comes to rediscover himself to be the all; and this achievement can be effected only through a controlled and perfect sublimation of the mind. Mind has an existence only when it entertains its natural tossings, doubts and emotions. If thoughts do not arise in the mental plane, that itself is the 'state of no mind'. In order to reach this 'state of mindlessness' the yogī is advised not only to practise a life of self-restraint and self-control, study and retirement, but also to bring the newly released energy of his mind to a single pointed application at a given point for purposes of developing its powers of concentration.

In the case of those who walk the path of bhakti (devotion), they have the natural prop for meditation and concentration in the name and form of their beloved Lord. In the case of the Haṭhayogin, he has the kuṇḍalinī-śakti (the serpent power). For the Karmayogin, similarly, there is constant remembrance of his all dedication to the Lord of the universe, Śrī Nārāyaṇa. It is only for the rare few who come to tread the rocky uphill path of knowledge that we find it difficult to provide them with an intellectually feasible prop to fix their mental attention and develop their secret powers of high concentration.

No doubt the Śruti texts are, in themselves, the ultimate prop for the student of Vedānta in his meditation. But before

he can launch himself into the philosophical contemplations upon the nature of the divine Spark, the Self in himself, he must first of all have a powerful and high degree of concentration to apply himself. This early training for the development of his powers of concentration is achieved by him through the process now discussed by the Śruti, in this mantra. Kind Śruti advises the students of Vedānta to meditate upon the Puruṣa who dwells in the centre of the heart and who is of the size of one's own thumb.

To limit the all-pervading Truth to the form of the thumb and to locate It within the limitations of a circumscribed space, as the human heart, is indeed a blasphemy! But the Śruti permits herself even to stoop down to such crime against herself, only to provide her children with something to lean upon and learn to step out on their first few steps in walking the halls of wisdom.



अङ्गुष्ठमात्रः पुरुषो ज्योतिरिवाधूमकः ।
ईशानो भूतभव्यस्य स एवाद्य स उ श्वः ॥
एतद्वै तत् ॥ १३ ॥

*aṅguṣṭhamātraḥ puruṣo jyotirivādhūmakah,
īśāno bhūtabhavyasya sa evādyā sa u śvāḥ.
etad-vai tat. (13)*

अङ्गुष्ठमात्रः – of the size of a thumb; पुरुषः – the Puruṣa; ज्योतिः – flame, light; इव – like; अधूमकः – without smoke; ईशानः – the Lord; भूतभव्यस्य – of the past and future; स एव – he alone; अद्य

– is today; स उ – he alone; श्वः – (will be) tomorrow; एतत् – this (is); वै – verily; तत् – That

13. *That person, of the size of a thumb, is like flame without smoke, Lord of the past and future. He alone is even today, and will be verily tomorrow. This is verily That.*

That Puruṣa or Ātman of the size of the thumb, who is perceived by the meditator in his heart as light or jyoti, exists immutably through all times – past, present and future. He exists in all living beings now, and He will certainly be existing in all forms tomorrow also.

Some sādhakas taking this line very literally start imagining ‘a thumb-like flame’ as though burning bright within their bosom and meditate long upon it. Personally, this sādhu had known an individual who had been imagining this ‘light’ for the past twenty-three years, and who, recently approached the Swami with a very sad and melancholy face to complain of his ‘spiritual fall’ since he is not having nowadays the darśana of his Ātman!

Friends, this is only one instance of the desperation of a foolish sādha who had come to believe that his imagination created delusory flame dream is his Ātman! It is dangerous certainly to try to walk the path of knowledge without continuous study of the scriptures and constant satsaṅga with real Mahātmās; we mean not the palm reading, stargazing, herb selling mahātmās that flock the city streets of our unhappy land nowadays! Let them be courted by the ignorant multitude that hustle out of the universities of India! But to a true seeker of Truth and to an intelligent follower

of religion, such Mahātmās are mere ochre clothed criminals poisoning the very atmosphere of this sacred land of the ṛṣis. When we shall have a government intelligent enough to feed the country better and provide with sufficient work, we shall have these monsters wiped out from our market scene. Till then we must learn to endure what cannot be avoided!!

The thumb-like jyoti, recommended by the great ṛṣis, is only to provide the meditator with a prop to develop his concentration during the early stages of his practices. The stone idol of Śiva is not in itself Śrī Parameśvara. Similarly, the jyoti is but an idol for the Vedāntin to meditate upon during his practices and it is not the Ātman. If an idol is unfortunately stolen away from a temple, it doesn't mean that God has been stolen away!

When a sādḥaka has developed his power of concentration, he enters, by degrees, into the higher stages of meditation advised by the Śruti, in the various Upaniṣads, and he ultimately comes to realise his own identity with his own Ātman, the light power wisdom source within him.



यथोदकं दुर्गे वृष्टं पर्वतेषु विधावति ।
एवं धर्मान्प्रथक्पश्यंस्तानेवानुविधावति ॥ १४ ॥

*yathodakam durge vṛṣṭam parvateṣu vidhāvati;
evam dharmān-prṭhak-paśyaṁ-stānevānuvidhāvati. (14)*

यथा – just as; उदकं – water; दुर्गे – on inaccessible heights (high) mountain ridges; वृष्टं – rained; पर्वतेषु – down the rocks; विधावति

– runs down scattered; एवं – so; धर्मान् – objects, attributes or the selves; पृथक् – different; पश्यन् – beholding; नानेव – them only; अनुविधावति – runs after

14. *Just as water, rained on (high) mountain ridges runs down the rocks scattering on all sides, so does he, who beholds the attributes as different, runs after them only (at all times).*

Here we are again, face to face with one of the celebrated mantras of this Upaniṣad which is often quoted by writers and orators.

The human mind is in fact a great dynamo of superhuman energies and godly powers. Yet we find that the ordinary human being is a slave and a servant of his own mind rather than a master of it. In a way, we may say that a similar tragedy has happened to man in the outer world too, especially in our machine age. The engines conceived of by man to work for him have now become the very tyrants and iron hearted masters at whose ever revolving wheels, man is today a helpless slave.

This tragedy in the within has come to pass because man, in his delusions and ignorance, has lost his capacity to control the promptings of his heart and the lusty surgings of his mind. The supreme wisdom and power which is in man gets scattered and flows in a thousand dripping rivulets down the mount of ignorance to get itself lost in its downward transit. This is indicated here in this mantra by the beautiful analogy of water that has rained on the top of a rocky mountain. If only we could conserve the total waterfall on the top of the hill with a powerful and well

engineered dam and direct the flow of the water through one single, determined channel we could get out of it a lot of useful work turned out. Similarly, if man could, through his discrimination, control wasteful flow of energy, conserving it and direct it intelligently in the positive channels of right living and high thinking, he could easily get out of this very same inner equipment, the power and glory of God upon earth.

But no, man will not and cannot bless himself unless and until he slowly learns to remove his ignorance of his own real nature with the sacred knowledge gained through a personal experience of his own eternal godliness.



यथोदकं शुद्धे शुद्धमासिक्तं तादृगेव भवति ।
एवं मुनेर्विजानत आत्मा भवति गौतम ॥ १५ ॥

इति काठकोपनिषदि द्वितीयाध्याये चतुर्थी वल्ली समाप्ता ॥

*yathodakam śuddhe śuddham-āsiktaṁ tādṛgeva bhavati,
evaṁ muner-vijānata ātmā bhavati gautama. (15)*

iti kāṭhakopaniṣadi dvitīyādhyāye caturthī vallī samāptā.

यथा – just as; उदकं – water; शुद्धे – into pure (water); शुद्धम् – pure; आसिक्तं – poured; तादृगेव – the same only; भवति – becomes; एवं – thus; मुनेः – of the thinker (sage); विजानतः – who knows this (unity); आत्मा – Ātman, Self; भवति – becomes; गौतम – O Gautama (Naciketā)

15. *As pure water poured into pure water becomes the same only, so becomes the Ātman of the thinker (sage) who knows this, (unity of the Ātman) O Gautama!*

(Thus ends the fourth vallī in the second chapter)

This concluding mantra of the fourth section reasserts the oneness of the divine presence in man and the totality of divinity that pervades everywhere. Man minus his ego is God; God plus ego is man. Annihilation of the ego sense in us is the becoming of God. When we totally detach ourselves from our misunderstanding and false values of a delusory life with the knowledge of the True and the Eternal, the ego evaporates away, leaving behind only the Truth Absolute, in all its purity and grandeur.

At this moment, the individual realises his own real nature as pure Consciousness. With this Self-realisation, he experiences his oneness with the all-pervading and immortal Truth. When pure water is poured into pure water there can only be pure water alone. Similarly, in realising oneself to be the eternal factor, one at once realises his own oneness with the One that alone is the one. The individual Self is the supreme Self.

In fact, even after such clear declarations, if we must misunderstand the true import of the Śruti and cry down the Vedas as full of contradictions and vague statements, we must be the most unsympathetic readers and most dull witted students of our Bible.

Long years of utter neglect of scriptural studies and the lack of proper teachers for the educated class have undermined the Sanātana culture. These have, to an extent, succeeded in distorting, if not destroying, the Hindu culture especially among the rich and the upper middle classes.

The above tragedies have made of us today what we are – a nation of Hindus where rarely we meet a true Hindu! Even the best of them dread to read, and try to understand their own Bible, the Upaniṣads.

Upaniṣads are the very documents revealing the greatest scientific discoveries man had ever made of life and the value of life. Without the Upaniṣads, Hinduism is not a religion at all!





SECTION 5 – पञ्चमी वल्ली

The Inner Soul – immanent yet transcendent

पुरमेकादशद्वारमजस्यावक्रचेतसः ।
अनुष्ठाय न शोचति विमुक्तश्च विमुच्यते ॥
एतद्वै तत् ॥ १ ॥

*puramekādaśadvāram-ajasyāvakracetasah,
anuṣṭhāya na śocati vimuktaśca vimucyate.
etad-vai tat. (1)*

पुरम् – city; एकादश – with eleven; द्वारम् – gates; अजस्य – of the unborn; अवक्र – not crooked (lit. straight or eternally existent); चेतसः – minded; अनुष्ठाय – having meditated upon; न शोचति – one does not grieve; विमुक्तः – being Liberated; च – and; विमुच्यते – (He) becomes free (from birth and death); एतत् – this is; वै – verily; तत् – That

1. This body of eleven gates is indeed of the unborn even minded Self. Having meditated upon this (the seeker) grieves not and gets Liberated from all bonds of ignorance indeed and becomes free. This is verily That.

puram-ekādaśa-dvāram (city with eleven gates) – The body with its eleven opening gates is meant here by the ‘city’. We have altogether seven openings in the head, three opening in

the trunk¹ and the eleventh one is the subtle aperture called the 'brahmarandhra' at the crown of the head, famous in the *Yogaśāstra*.

The comparison of the body with a city is quite appropriate inasmuch as we have gates, gatekeepers, their controllers, a palace and a king, under whose orders all the servants carry out their appointed duties very systematically and very regularly, both in a city as well as in the body. The sense organ openings are the gates; the presiding deities are the gatekeepers; the mind, the controller; and Puruṣa, the king.

anuṣṭhāya (having meditated upon) – He who meditates constantly upon the Lord of the heart gets rid of his ignorance and ignorance created ego sense and realises the true nature of the Self. Therefore, naturally, he grieves not, being Liberated from all bonds of ignorance and becoming free from the trammels of birth and death.

This is 'That' which Naciketā has asked of the Guru Lord Death, to explain.



ह२सः शुचिषद्वसुरन्तरिक्षसद्धोता वेदिषदतिथिर्दुरोणसत् ।
नृषद्वरसदृतसद्वयोमसदब्जा गोजा ऋतजा अद्रिजा ऋतं बृहत् ॥ २ ॥

*haṁsaḥ śuciṣad-vasurantarikṣasadhotā vediṣad-atithir-duroṇasat,
nṛṣad-varasadṛtasad-vyomasad-abjā gojā ṛtajā adrijā ṛtaṁ bṛhat. (2)*

¹ The navel and two lower ones – one each in front and back

हंसः – haṁsa (the sun, lit. one who moves); शुचिषद् – dwelling in the heavens; वसुः – air (vāyu); अन्तरिक्षसत् – existing in the sky; होता – fire (lit. the sacrificer); वेदिषत् – existing on the sacrificial altar; अतिथिः – guest; दुरोणसत् – he dwells in a house; नृषत् – dwelling in man; वरसत् – in the superior gods; ऋतसत् – dwelling in the sacrifice; व्योमसत् – dwelling in the sky; अब्जा – born in the water; गोजा – born in the earth; ऋतजा – born in the sacrifice; अद्रिजा – born on the mountains; ऋतं – the true and; बृहत् – the great

2. As haṁsa (sun), He dwells in heaven; as vāyu (air), He dwells in the sky; as fire, He dwells on the sacrificial altar (or on earth); as guest, He dwells in a house, He dwells in man, in the gods, in the sacrifice, (Truth), in the sky. He is born in the water, He is born on the earth, He is born in the sacrifice, He is born on the mountains; He is the true and the great.

The Puruṣa who has been explained, in the last mantras, as residing in the human body is now explained in its wider aspect as the lordly one, who presides over all the functions in every form. The stanza gives us a very melodious list of living organisms and forms in the universe.

abjā (born in water) – In the form of conch, mother-of-pearl, shell, fish, insects; in short, all aquatic animals and insects.

gojā (born of the earth) – In the form of corns, grains, plants, trees, herbs and so on.

adrijā (born of mountains) – In the form of rivers, springs, rivulets and so on.



ऊर्ध्वं प्राणमुन्नयत्यपानं प्रत्यगस्यति ।
मध्ये वामनमासीनं विश्वे देवा उपासते ॥ ३ ॥

*ūrdhvaṁ prāṇam-unnayatyapānaṁ pratyagasyati,
madhye vāmanam-āsīnaṁ viśve devā upāsate. (3)*

ऊर्ध्व – upward; प्राणम् – the prāṇa; उन्नयति – sends up; अपानं – apāna; प्रत्यक् – downwards; अस्यति – throws; मध्ये – in the middle (heart); वामनम् – the adorable one; आसीनं – seated; विश्वे – all; देवाः – devas, gods (senses); उपासते – worship, serve

3. He (Brahman) sends the prāṇa upward and throws the apāna downward. All devas worship, that adorable one, seated in the centre.

If the Life Centre, Ātman, were not within a body, it is obvious that, that body will not continue to breathe. Naturally, the mantra becomes clear when it says that He, the Ātman or Puruṣa, is the one who maintains the flow of the different vital airs through our body and maintains it alive and active till its death.

There are five principal kinds of vital energy, because of which the physical body functions. They are known by different names according to the function they perform, although they altogether constitute the one and the same principle of existence. The five principal kinds of prāṇas are called – (1) prāṇa, when the cosmic power manifests through the work of the lungs and the respiratory organs; (2) apāna, when it works in the colon and bladders; (3) samāna, when it works through the digestive system; (4) udāna, when it works through the larynx and produces voice and (5) vyāna,

when it expresses itself through the blood circulation in the body. Thus, it is to be noted carefully that prāṇa is not merely breath. Prāṇa is the vital energy, and breath is only one of its various manifestations.

devāḥ (gods) – We have already explained this term in a previous mantra where we clearly concluded that the word ‘gods’ does not represent the inhabitants of the heavenly regions, but the five great elements which are deities of the five organs of knowledge in man. Here it only shows that the sense organs can function only in the blessings of the Puruṣa and so, naturally, the Upaniṣad in its language says that all the devas, meaning, the sense organs worship the one seated in the ‘centre’.



अस्य विस्त्रंसमानस्य शरीरस्थस्य देहिनः ।
देहाद्विमुच्यमानस्य किमत्र परिशिष्यते ॥
एतद्वै तत् ॥ ४ ॥

*asya visram-samānasya śarīrasthasya dehinaḥ,
dehād-vimucyamānasya kimatra pariśiṣyate.
etad-vai tat. (4)*

अस्य – this; विस्त्रंसमानस्य – of him who is separated; शरीरस्थस्य – who dwells in the body; देहिनः – to the indweller (soul); देहात् – from the body; विमुच्यमानस्य – of him who is freed from the body; किम् – what; अत्र – here (in this body); परिशिष्यते – remains; एतत् – this is; वै – verily; तत् – That

4. *When this Ātman, who dwells in the body, is separated from the body, when He is freed from this body, what remains here (in this body)? This verily is That.*

The Ātman, upon whom all the indriyas depend and who is the controller and director of all the vital airs, is the king of this city of eleven gates, our body. Just as, when the beloved king leaves the capital permanently to stay in a different chosen capital, all his subject people follow the king into the new capital, so too, when the Ātman departs from a body, all the activities of that physical body seemingly depart with the Ātman.

When once the Lord quits the body, however great the man might have been while living, his body starts to decay and perish until ultimately it reaches the dust from which the material of the body had come.

kimatra pariśiṣyate (what remains then?) – When the Ātman has departed from the body what remains in the body? With this question Śruti confronts us with the sacred Truth that there remains practically nothing upon which we may glorify that empty shell, the dead body!!



न प्राणेन नापानेन मर्त्यो जीवति कश्चन ।
इतरेण तु जीवन्ति यस्मिन्नेतावुपाश्रितौ ॥ ५ ॥

*na prāṇena nāpānena martyo jīvati kaścana,
itareṇa tu jīvanti yasminnetāvupāśritau. (5)*

न – not; प्राणेन – by prāṇa; न अपानेन – nor by apāna; मर्त्यः – the mortal (the man or the body); जीवति – lives; कश्चन – ever; इतरेण – by some other; तु – but; जीवन्ति – (they) live; यस्मिन् – on whom; एतौ – these two; उपाश्रितौ – depend

5. Not by prāṇa, not by apāna does any mortal live; but it is by some other, on which these two depend, that men live.

One who has followed the commentaries and, therefore, the mantras so far, should not find any difficulty at all in understanding the direct statement of the Śruti when she says that a man lives not because his body-mind-intellect equipment is functioning well when the prāṇas function, but that all signs of life's activities met with, in a living man, depend upon the glorious touch of the Self in him. The prāṇas function only when life resides in the body.

Though the meaning of the stanza is clear and direct, the philosophical implications in the statement of the Śruti are rather new to the early students in the study of the Hindu śāstras.

The parts constituting an assemblage are in themselves not free. They constitute together and maintain themselves as such only for the benefit of somebody else, who is not himself a part of the assembly. For example, let us take the case of a house. The walls, the rafters, the beams, the tiles and so on, are all necessary parts which together constitute the house. The house is not built for the walls, nor for the rafters, nor for the beams. They all together form an entire whole only for the sake of the master of the house. Mr. Das, the owner of the house, has all the freedom to walk in or walk out of

his house at his own sweet will; not so, for the bricks that constitute the walls!

Similarly, the indriyas, the limbs of the body, the mind and intellect are all parts of the body assembly which exist only for the sake of the Puruṣa in it. The body in itself has no freedom to act as it lasts, while the Puruṣa can walk out of the body in all freedom at the time of death. When once Mr. Das has discarded his house, in time, it perishes in ruins; when the Ātman leaves the body, the body perishes. The source of life is not prāṇas; the prāṇas end and perish themselves, when the Ātman, the source of life, discards its temple, the body.

In the terminology of śāstra, they say that all actions, physical, mental and intellectual, are prāṇa-vṛttis.



हन्त त इदं प्रवक्ष्यामि गुह्यं ब्रह्म सनातनम् ।
यथा च मरणं प्राप्य आत्मा भवति गौतम ॥ ६ ॥

*hanta ta idaṁ pravakṣyāmi guhyaṁ brahma sanātanam,
yathā ca maraṇaṁ prāpya ātmā bhavati gautama. (6)*

हन्त – well, now; ते – to thee; इदं – this; प्रवक्ष्यामि – I will explain; गुह्यं – the mysterious; ब्रह्म – Brahman; सनातनम् – the ancient, the eternal; यथा – what; च – and; मरणं – death; प्राप्य – having obtained; आत्मा – the Ātman; भवति – becomes, happens; गौतम – O Gautama (Naciketā).

6. Well now, O Gautama! I will explain thee the mysterious and ancient Brahman, and (also) what happens to the soul after death.

All that Lord Death has so far said seems to be but an introduction to enter the subject proper which is ‘What happens to the soul after death!’ Lord Death here kindly informs Naciketā he will be now initiated into the knowledge of what happens to the jīva when it has once experienced the process of death in its delusions. And surely, we shall never have a better reporter than Lord Death himself to explain to us ‘What happens to the soul’ after the body has become cold and inert in the icy embrace of death!

Ātmā (ego centre) – In the Upaniṣad mantras, we often meet with the use of the word ‘Ātman’ to indicate sometimes the body, sometimes the mind, sometimes intellect and, yet at other times, the mind and mind-conditioned pure Consciousness, the jīva. Here, in this particular mantra, the word ‘Ātman’ is used to indicate the ego centre and not the Self. For, if we were to assume that the word literally means its own special connotation, it would mean that the mantra here is contradicting the very philosophy of the Upaniṣads. Nothing ever happens to pure Consciousness, the Truth. When pure Consciousness presides over the functions of this body, with reference to the body, it is said to be the ‘individual soul’ just as the all-pervading space with reference to the four walls of a room is said to be the ‘room space’.

In fact, the eternal space can never be conditioned or limited by the walls, which themselves stand in space. Similarly, Consciousness or Knowledge is homogeneous and one without a second. When the body perishes, the divine Spark, or the Life Centre, that presided over the body while it lived, undergoes no change but eternally remains the same.

The death and the consequent departure from the dead body at the time of death, and the feeling of having entered a new form at the time of birth, are both the delusory ideas of the ego centre.

The supreme Self reflected in the mind-intellect is, we have already seen, the jīva or the ego. This ego idea leaves its ideas of 'I-ness' and 'my-ness' with the dead body, each ego centre comes to develop its sense of ownership and possession with another body form.

Thus, when Lord Death says that he will explain 'What happens to the Ātman after death' he certainly means to explain to us what happens to the jīva with all its vanities of 'I-ness' and attachment of 'my-ness' when it leaves one body to perish and enters the womb to take up another birth.



योनिमन्ये प्रपद्यन्ते शरीरत्वाय देहिनः ।
स्थाणुमन्येऽनुसंयन्ति यथाकर्म यथाश्रुतम् ॥ ७ ॥

yonimanye prapadyante śarīratvāya dehinaḥ,
sthāṇumanye' nusaṁyanti yathā-karma yathā-śrutam. (7)

योनिम् – womb; अन्ये – others, some; प्रपद्यन्ते – go, enter into; शरीरत्वाय – to have a body; देहिनः – embodied souls; स्थाणुम् – plants (lit. immovable); अन्ये – some; अनुसंयन्ति – continuously follows, go; यथा – according to; कर्म – action or work; यथा – according to; श्रुतम् – knowledge

7. Some souls enter the womb to have a body, others go to the plants just according to their work and according to their knowledge.

‘Sthāṇum’ means ‘immovable’. Hence, it may mean either the vegetable kingdom or it may also mean the inert world of stones and slabs. It is often claimed, in an unwarranted optimism, that a being having been born once into the human form will not, whatever be the atrocities he might commit during his lifetime, go down so much in the ladder of evolution as to reach the lowest bottom level of mere stones! There are even spiritual preceptors who also support this optimistic view to encourage their disciples and emphatically assert that, having once come to take the incarnation as man, that individual will not, on any score, degrade himself into such a low level as that of the animal life or will ever come to exist as the inert rocks. This false optimism is smothered here by the open statement of the Upaniṣad in this mantra.

In the 6th mantra of the first vallī (section) we had already a clear indication of the Law of karma and the Doctrine of reincarnation, when Naciketā stated, like corn the mortals decay and like corn they are born again. In this mantra also the Śruti speaks, definitely, supporting the Law of karma and the Doctrine of reincarnation.

The ego centre, after the death of the body, remains intact in the form of ‘an idea’ until it comes again to fix the relationship with another form. That which helps the ‘floating ego’ to choose its next rendezvous is the sum total of the reapings it has to make with ‘new form’ in the new field of things and circumstances. Indeed, there is no

philosophical concept so tight in logic and so true in reason as the Law of karma which is a special blessing enjoyed only by the Hindu community. Unfortunately, as a result of our criminal neglect of the study of our own scriptures, if we have come to read in the Law of karma only a repetition of the sapless philosophy of the Law of destiny, it is, indeed, not the fault of the Upaniṣad seers. If properly understood, Law of karma gives into our individual hands the privilege and the might to carve out our own destinies to be lived by in the days to come.¹

yathā karma (according to karma) – According to the quality of the actions performed in the past, we shall have a future existence in a form and in a set of circumstances necessary to reap the required quality of reactions in the form of experiences.

yathā śrutam (according to knowledge) – The future lives are dependent not only upon the actions committed in the past but also by the degree of the knowledge of the Reality we have gained in and through our living their reactions.²



य एष सुप्तेषु जागर्ति कामं कामं पुरुषो निर्ममाणः ।
तदेव शुक्रं तद्ब्रह्म तदेवामृतमुच्यते ।
तस्मिँल्लोकाः श्रिताः सर्वे तद् नात्येति कश्चन ॥
एतद्वै तत् ॥ ८ ॥

¹ Refer Swamiji's discourses on *Kenopaniṣad*.

² Refer for amplification *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad*-3.2.13

*ya eṣa supteṣu jāgarti kāmam kāmam puruṣo nirmimāṇaḥ,
tad-eva śukraṁ tad-brahma tadevāmṛtamucyate,
tasmimllokāḥ śritāḥ sarve tadu nātyeti kaścana.
etad-vai tat. (8)*

यः – who; एषः – this; सुप्तेषु – while we are asleep; जागर्ति – remains awake; कामं कामं – different objects of desire; पुरुषः – the Puruṣa; निर्ममाणः – shaping; तत् – that; एव – verily; शुक्रं – the pure; तत् – that; ब्रह्म – Brahman; तदेव – that also; अमृतम् – immortal; उच्यते – is called; तस्मिन् – in that; लोकाः – the worlds; श्रिताः – rest; सर्वे – all; तत् – that; उ – verily; अत्येति – transcends; न कश्चन – none; एतत् – this is; वै – verily; तत् – That

8. The Puruṣa who remains awake shaping (all sorts of) objects of desires (into dreams) even while we are asleep – verily, that is the pure, the Brahman, and that is also called the Immortal. In That rests all the worlds and none can transcend That. This verily is That (which you asked for).

The waking state world of sense objects and their cognition are not possible without the presence of pure Intelligence within the body. So too, we have already found that the dreamworld would not have been available for our experience had it not been again lit up by the very same Intelligence. In the deep sleep state too, the Intelligence continuously illuminates for us the idea of ‘I do not know’. Thus, pure Intelligence, the Self, ever remains as a Witness of the three states. It is neither awake, nor does It ever dream, nor does It ever sleep! In Its presence, the three different states play the relay race.

In the *Kenopaniṣad*, we have made this point amply clear with the analogy of a street lamp. The light of the street lamp illuminates everything that comes into its pool of light. It may illumine at one time a honeymooning couple singing and dancing in their new found joys of physical companionship; at another moment it may light up a drunken party laughing and dancing in their intoxication; and yet, at another moment, it may light up a moanful procession of a sad funeral pyre. In all the three cases the light of the street lamp is neither happy as a honeymoon couple, nor drunken as the revellers, nor sad and sorrowful as the bereaved in the funeral procession!

Similarly, the Intelligence that reigns within us, illuminates for us the world of the waking state, the world of the dream state and that of the deep sleep state, without Itself ever undergoing any of these experiences.

Lord Death is now trying to point out to his disciple, Naciketā, what the Self is, through a consideration, and in terms of the experiences known to the student during his present existence in the world of ignorance. A school master knows that the best way to start teaching a student – addition or subtraction – is not by directly making the child play with the numerical figures, but to make him understand the idea of addition through familiar objects. Thus it is very well known that a school master always takes examples from the child's own life. 'Supposing you have ten mangoes' starts the master, 'and your friend has five mangoes; how many mangoes are there with both, between you and him?' This question is asked by the master not for the purpose of keeping the mango accounts but to make the child understand the greater

principles of arithmetic through what is already familiar to the child. Similarly, the Upaniṣad texts always adopt the method of raising a seeker into the highest realms by explaining to him the Truth in which he is well versed at the moment of his approach to the feet of his Teacher.

No human can be unaware of the three planes of Consciousness through which he daily passes; namely, the waking state, the dream state, and the deep sleep state. If now a Teacher approaches us and explains to us that there is one constant illuminating factor, in the presence of which alone the experiences of the three planes of Consciousness become real and cognisable for us, it must necessarily be easy for us to feel for ourselves intuitively this factor, the eternal Self.

Since the Self is not polluted by our criminal intentions, low lusty desires, jealousies and selfishness of our life (just as the street light is untouched by the varied scenes it comes to illuminate), the Ātman, as the sole witnessing factor, is indeed ever pure.

The rest of the words in the mantra stand explained by themselves, to all those who have followed our detailed commentary so far.



अग्निर्यथैको भुवनं प्रविष्टो
रूपं रूपं प्रतिरूपो बभूव ।
एकस्तथा सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा
रूपं रूपं प्रतिरूपो बहिश्च ॥ ९ ॥

*agniryathaiko bhuvanam praviṣṭo
rūpaṁ rūpaṁ pratirūpo babhūva,
ekastathā sarvabhūtāntarātmā
rūpaṁ rūpaṁ pratirūpo bahiṣca. (9)*

अग्निः – fire; यथा – just as; एकः – one single; भुवनं – world; प्रविष्टः – having entered; रूपं रूपं – every form; प्रतिरूपः – respective forms; बभूव – becomes; एकः – one; तथा – thus; सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा – the inner Self of all beings; रूपं रूपं – different forms; प्रतिरूपः – according to the form (He enters); बहिश्च – and outside, beyond

9. Just as fire, after it has entered the world, though one, assumes different forms according to the shape it enters, so does the eternal Ātman of all living beings, though one, takes a form according to each shape It enters and also (in Itself) It exists beyond them.

Of the 108 accepted Upaniṣads, there is none so melodiously poetical (for its mellifluous words, its rhyme and rhythm and for the exquisite poetic ideas and pictures) as *Kaṭhōpaniṣad* is. It would be a safe commentary to say that *Kaṭhōpaniṣad* is a touchstone for both poetry and philosophy in Sanskrit literature. In no other language in the world have we such magnanimous flights of human thoughts expressed in such breathless poetry!! In *Kaṭhōpaniṣad* we have a love kindling arbour where poetry courts successfully her paramour, philosophy!!

The mantra under discussion is an ample evidence to prove the truth of our previous statements.

The same coloured fluid in a flat bottle would look long and in a flask it would look spherical. Because of the

different shapes we cannot label the same fluid differently. Similarly, the dynamic Life Centre remaining the same, It illuminates different forms. The forms are different but the spiritual substance is universally the same.

The electric current that passes through a fan, a bulb, a refrigerator and a heater is certainly the same, although, because of difference in the instruments through which it passes, it manifests itself differently as air, light, cold, heat and so on. The Ātma-tattva, similarly, remains the same, in spite of the different make-up of the different minds that It comes to function through. Its manifestations are of different forms. Thus, it is that you are not me, nor am I you, because my mind is constituted differently from yours. Yet our Ātman is the same.

bahiśca (beyond also) – Pure Consciousness, the all-pervading Truth, certainly presides over every form, vitalising every cell in them; but adds the Śruti ‘Truth is not limited to cover only the area or extent occupied by the manifested life!’

Life in the millions of universes put together is but, according to the Lord’s own words in the *Gītā*, only a fraction of the divine Total! This is indicated by the Śruti here by emphasising that Truth Absolute not only pervades every visible form and invisible world, but also transcends them all. In short, the supreme Reality is at once immanent and transcendent.



वायुर्यथैको भुवनं प्रविष्टो
रूपं रूपं प्रतिरूपो बभूव ।
एकस्तथा सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा
रूपं रूपं प्रतिरूपो बहिश्च ॥ १० ॥

*vāyuryathaiko bhuvanam praviṣṭo
rūpaṁ rūpaṁ pratirūpo babhūva,
ekastathā sarvabhūtāntarātmā
rūpaṁ rūpaṁ pratirūpo bahiśca. (10)*

वायुः – air; यथा – just as; एकः – one single; भुवनं – world; प्रविष्टः – having entered; रूपं रूपं – different forms; प्रतिरूपः – according to the shape it enters, respective forms; बभूव – becomes (takes); एकः – one; तथा – thus; सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा – the inner Ātman of all beings; रूपं रूपं – different forms; प्रतिरूपः – according to whatever form (he enters); बहिः – outside (beyond); च – also

10. Just as air, after it has entered the world, though one, assumes different forms, according to the shape it enters, so the eternal Ātman of all living beings, though one, assumes forms, according to each shape It enters, and (in Itself) It exists beyond them (also).

Here is another beautiful comparison to explain the same oneness of Truth that was indicated in the previous mantra. Instead of fire, Lord Death is explaining the same Truth with the example of vāyu. Whether it be horse, a donkey or a man, creeper or a fig tree, all live upon the same vital air, oxygen. Similarly, whatever be the name and shape of the objects in the universe that we may cognise, they are all presided over by the same non-dual Truth Essence.

Since this stanza is a close repetition of the previous one, given out by the Śruti for purpose of emphasis, we satisfy ourselves with just hinting at the beauty contents of it.



सूर्यो यथा सर्वलोकस्य चक्षु-
न लिप्यते चाक्षुषैर्बाह्यदोषैः ।
एकस्तथा सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा
न लिप्यते लोकदुःखेन बाह्यः ॥ ११ ॥

*sūryo yathā sarvalokasya cakṣu-
rna lipyate cākṣuṣair-bāhyadoṣaiḥ,
ekastathā sarvabhūtāntarātmā
na lipyate lokaduḥkhena bāhyaḥ. (11)*

सूर्यः – the sun; यथा – as; सर्वलोकस्य – to all the world (beings);
चक्षुः – eye; न लिप्यते – is not contaminated, tainted; चाक्षुषैः – by
the ocular; बाह्यदोषैः – external defects (impurities); एकः –
one; तथा – so; सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा – the innermost essence (soul) that
resides in all beings; न लिप्यते – is not touched, does not get
contaminated; लोक – worldly; दुःखेन – sorrows, miseries; बाह्यः
– external (transcends them)

11. Just as the sun, the eye of the whole world, is not contaminated by the defects of the external eye, so being the innermost essence in all beings, Ātmā is not contaminated by external sorrows of the world.

sarva lokasya cakṣu (the eye of the whole world) – Without the light energy provided by the sun we would not have been

able to make use of our eyes in discriminating the various forms and colours or the sense objects in the world. Nor would we have the moon to provide us with moonlight at least during the bright fortnights, if the sun were not there to lend its light to the moon to reflect! Apart from all these and probably built upon a thorough knowledge of the science of light, the ancient ṛṣis of the Upaniṣads have declared, even in the Vaidika period, that the sun is the presiding deity of the sense organ, the eye. Thus, it is most appropriate to term 'The sun as the eye of the universe'.

The light of the sun illumines equally all the objects in all conditions of health and decay. Whether the sunlight illumines a scene of meritorious sacrifice or a dire scene of calculated villainy, the sunlight, as such, does not get either blessed or condemned by the qualities of the very scenes it illumines.

Similarly, the Ātman is not tainted by the miseries of the world, arising from the kāma and karma of the egocentric individuals living the delusions of their own ignorance. All sorrows are created by our unrestrained desires and our attempts in the world of sense objects to fulfil our desires through passion motivated, self-willed actions (kāma karma-udbhavam duḥkham).

Whatever be the condition of the ghost in the post, the post is not the least affected; whatever be the threatening aspects of the snake in the rope, the rope is not in any way affected; in whatever condition be the surface of the mirage water, the desert is not at all affected! Similarly, whatever

be the condition of the world and our experiences of it, in our present embodiment, the Truth, which is the substratum for the delusion created world myth, is not, in the least, affected.

There are mainly two schools of thought among the Hindu philosophers as they try to explain the relative status of Truth and the world. Some claim that the supreme Reality modified Itself to become this world; as the milk gets modified to become curd. Vedāntins condemn this point of view, since it is faulty according to their line of argument. They condemn this theory on the score that if the supreme Reality were to suffer Itself to undergo a modification, just as the milk is no more in the curd, the Supreme will have to end Itself to become the world which is naturally absurd. Again, the Vedāntins argue that if the world is a modification (pariṇāma) of the supreme Reality, then according to the Pariṇāma-vādins, the Supreme is available for change and that which undergoes change cannot be Eternal, but must necessarily fall within the boundaries of finitude. Thus, if the pariṇāma-vāda is accepted, the supreme Reality Itself becomes a finite perishable quantity!!

On the other hand, the Vedāntins view the creation as a superimposition upon Truth, caused by the jugglery of the mind, termed as ‘māyā’. This argument of the Vedāntins is termed as the ‘vivarta-vāda’. Here, the Supreme undergoes no change at all but ever remains in Its eternal purity and immortal grandeur; the rope undergoes no change, nor gains for itself even a drop of venom when a traveller in the dusk misunderstands it to be a snake.

The mantra under discussion seems to support wholeheartedly Śrī Śaṅkarācārya's standpoint. Anyway the 'Theory of modification' stands blasted in the presence of the more brilliant and satisfying 'Theory of superimposition' in explaining the Real and the unreal.



एको वशी सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा
एकं रूपं बहुधा यः करोति ।
तमात्मस्थं येऽनुपश्यन्ति धीरा-
स्तेषां सुखं शाश्वतं नेतरेषाम् ॥ १२ ॥

*eko vaśī sarvabhūtāntarātmā
ekam rūpaṁ bahudhā yaḥ karoti,
tamātmasthaṁ ye'nupaśyanti dhīrā-
steṣāṁ sukhaṁ śāśvataṁ netareṣāṁ. (12)*

एकः – one; वशी – ruler (controller); सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा – the soul of all beings; एकं – one, single; रूपं – form; बहुधा – manifold; यः – who; करोति – makes; तम् – Him; आत्मस्थं – as existing within their own Self; ये – those; अनुपश्यन्ति – perceive; धीराः – wise men; तेषां – their; सुखं – happiness; शाश्वतं – eternal; न इतरेषाम् – to none else

12. (That) one (Supreme) ruler, the soul of all beings, who makes His one form manifold – those wise men, who perceive Him as existing in their own Self, to them belongs eternal happiness, and to none else.

The self arrogating ego centres viewing out of themselves through the shattering instruments of their mind and

intellect, observe everywhere nothing more sacred than an eternal variety of endless plurality. Consequently, they suffer all the pains of life, their own self-created problems of life. The mind and intellect equipment has a prism effect when the undivided beam of the Self's light passes through it ! The intelligence seemingly encased within the body can reach the outer world of sense objects and cognise them only through the coordinating agent, the mind. But the wise, transcending the limitations of both their mind and intellect, learn to look out through their faculty called 'intuition'. Intuitively viewed, Truth alone is the experience available at all places, and at all times!

The Self is the source of the light which, at the interception of the mental prism, seemingly disperses Itself into the variegated band of innumerable names and forms, which constitute the jagat. The yogī in his discriminating wisdom, successfully withdraws his mind's delusory hobnobbing with its own ignorance created plurality, and in the moments of his deep meditations, his awareness comes to be aware of Itself as the Self!

Our Consciousness becoming conscious of Itself, the pure Consciousness, as the Self, is moment of Self-realisation or Īśvara-darśana. In order to enjoy this moment of supreme bliss and wisdom, the individual must necessarily be a highly evolved soul (dhīrah). Such ones alone can come to enjoy eternal bliss. That theirs is the experience of continued, unbroken and infinite joy is indicated here by the Śruti. She says that only such wise men who have come to realise their Self, are the real men of bliss and not others. The worldly men who are engrossed in external objects and who are not

endowed with discrimination are debarred by this statement to have ever a chance of enjoying infinite bliss through sense objects.



नित्योऽनित्यानां चेतनश्चेतनाना-
मेको बहूनां यो विदधाति कामान् ।
तमात्मस्थं येऽनुपश्यन्ति धीरा-
स्तेषां शान्तिः शाश्वती नेतरेषाम् ॥ १३ ॥

*nityo'nityānām cetanaś-cetanānā-
meko bahūnām yo vidadhāti kāmān,
tamātmastham ye'nupaśyanti dhīrā-
steṣām śāntiḥ śāśvatī netareṣām. (13)*

नित्यः – Eternal; अनित्यानां – amongst non-eternal; चेतनः – intelligence; चेतनानाम् – in the intelligent; एकः – one; बहूनां – of many; यः – who; विदधाति – fulfils; कामान् – desires; तम् – Him; आत्मस्थं – dwelling in their own Self; ये – those; अनुपश्यन्ति – perceive; धीराः – the wise men; तेषां – to them; शान्तिः – peace; शाश्वती – eternal; न इतरेषाम् – to none else

13. He, the Eternal among non-eternals, the intelligence in the intelligent, who, though one, fulfils the desires of many... those wise men who perceive Him as dwelling in their own Self, to them belongs eternal peace and to none else.

The method of assertion and denial adopted by the Śruti in the previous mantra is again repeated here when she reasserts, to them belongs the eternal peace and to none else.

What is to be realised in us, as the Self, is discussed here and in the discussion we are provided with enough material to understand intuitively the very nature of the soul which, you will remember, was the pointed query of the Brāhmaṇa seeker, Naciketā, to his Master, Lord Death. We may say that in no mantra in the entire scriptural literature of the Hindus is there a passage equal to the mantra under discussion in its completeness and directness of statement touching almost all the important factors, that language can express regarding the nature of the soul!

The world is a flux; a constant change of appearances, a transient play of names and forms. Even our very physical form is constantly changing hour by hour, through all the years of its existence. The medical science of the modern world declares that the constitution of every human body changes completely, as it were, once in every seven years; at every moment old cells are dying away and are being replaced by new ones. We come in contact with men and circumstances, and moment-to-moment we are ever-changing our physical habits, mental make-up, intellectual ideas and spiritual values. Nobody can stop the process of growth.

If this constant change were to give us the idea of a continuity, there must be some constant denominator that is ever constant. In the picture house, the ever-changing play of light and shade thrown out from the films gives the audience a sense of continuity because of the constant factor, the screen behind it; without the screen the audience would have seen no story at all! Waves, ripples, bubbles, froth and foam can all have their eternal dance to give us the idea of a continuous surge only when there is the constant,

unchanging, placid, depths of the oceans beneath them. The delusory ideas of a snake, a rod, a crack in the earth are all possible only when there is the unchanging truth behind it all, the rope.

Similarly, no world of flux could be possible without a base that is unchangeable and unchanging; no river can flow without a bed!

cetanaś-cetanānām (intelligence in the intelligent) – Again, if a piece of iron burns your fingers you know that the iron has no heat of its own and so must have borrowed it from fire. Similarly, if the body-mind-intellect equipment, which is itself nothing but matter, shows, at moments, an intelligence almost divine, we can easily presume that it has earned its intelligence from the Self, which is of the nature of pure Intelligence.

vidadhāti kāmān (who fulfils the desires of man) – Here again the Law of karma is obviously hinted at in a broad statement that the Self or the supreme Consciousness is the power behind the Law of karma, according to which each individual comes to live his allotted share of experiences in his individual life.

The one who is thus eternal and of the nature of pure Intelligence and who is the force behind the immutable Law of karma, is not a mere transcendental vitality divine who reigns somewhere in heavens like the mortal king or the president of a country dwelling in the capital, far away from the villages along the frontiers!! Vedānta is the highest achievement of man's wisdom.

The truth declarations of the ṛṣis represent, in themselves, the superhuman daring with which they must have plunged into the very womb of life to scoop it and discover for themselves the palpitating soul of one's own life, the true seat of all activities, the permanent and eternal factor, behind the ever-changing madness, which in its continuity gives the solid delusion called the 'jagat'.

Naturally, there have never been and there shall never be a textbook more sacred and noble as the Bible of the Hindus, the Upaniṣads. If some undeveloped and unintelligent foreign intruders have raised the cry of calumny against these mantras as 'blabberings of a humanity in childhood' and so on, we, in our greater understanding, shall only repeat what Christ said when he was condemned by a foolish generation, 'Lord forgive them; they know not what they do.'



तदेतदिति मन्यन्तेऽनिर्देश्यं परमं सुखम् ।
कथं नु तद्विजानीयां किमु भाति विभाति वा ॥ १४ ॥

*tadetaditi manyante'nirdeśyam paramam sukham
katham nu tad-vijānīyām kimu bhāti vibhāti vā. (14)*

तत् – that; एतत् – is this; इति – thus; मन्यन्ते – perceive, think; अनिर्देश्यं – indescribable; परमं – highest, supreme; सुखम् – bliss; कथं नु – how shall; तत् – that; विजानीयां – I know; किम् – whether; उ – verily; भाति – shines by Itself; विभाति – does It shine (by another light); वा – or

14. *They (the sages) perceive, that indescribable, highest bliss as 'this is That. How shall I know That? Does It shine (of Itself) or does It shine by another light?'*

This mantra can be considered as a question raised by Lord Death himself, only to be answered by himself in the next mantra. But, personally, Chinmaya would like to understand it as a sincere question raised by the supreme student of Vedānta in Naciketā.

In a previous stanza, Lord Death had already explained that the Self is beyond the sense perceptions or the mind's cognitions or the intellect's determinations, yet in the last two stanzas, Lord Death was dilating upon the sure and permanent joys of those who come to 'behold the Self'. Naturally, the intelligent students feel confused. Again, in the first half of the very same mantra, Lord Death asserts that the men of discrimination during their deep meditations come to the divine achievement of realising the all-pervading Truth intimately in a subjective experience as 'This is That'.

tadetaditi (this is That) – Truth is not perceived or felt or determined. Perception, feeling and determination are the functions of the sense organs, the mind and the intellect respectively; and these three can function only in the plane of plurality, the world of sense objects, thoughts and ideas. When the intelligent sage has successfully withdrawn all his ideas of identification with these three, at that moment (when he has thus completely transcended himself beyond the painful limitations of these three) he comes to realise that, what he has till now been seeking, was the nearest factor in him, his own Self!

At this moment, the disciple is raising his doubt which is marked by his own understanding of the philosophical discourses so far given by his Master. When the sense organs, the mind and the intellect are flouted and transcended, Naciketā asks what exactly would be the nature of the instrument used and the individual who used the instrument in realising the Self as ‘this is That?’ Even those of you who can at least come to appreciate at this moment of our discussion the entire implications in the doubt of Naciketā, can be considered to have thoroughly followed all the discussions made by the Śruti so far.

We have already shown, in a previous discussion, how in order to cognise and understand an object, we need the help of light. We then also found that for perceiving the gross light of the physical world, and in seeing the subtler objects of the mind, such as thought and so on, we have the light of Intelligence. So far, Naciketā also seems to have understood well. But, when Lord Death says that the seer of Vedānta transcending the regions of his mind and intellect comes to ‘behold the Self’ the Brāhmaṇa child feels confused!

kimu bhāti vibhāti vā (does It shine by Itself or does It shine by another light?) – A lamp is seen because of its own light, as opposed to the dull objects which get their light borrowed from a lamp.

In the philosophy of Vedānta, the question is answered by the great Masters very vividly. It is a case of the Self becoming aware of Itself. When the meditator has successfully hushed the mind and the intellect, in the throbbing silence within, his awareness becomes conscious of Itself. This is a

state of intuitive experience and not a physical cognition. It is to show this intimate 'Self-awareness of the Self' that we have, in the inimitable language and style of the scripture, the expression, 'this is That'.

The Self, being Itself the light of Wisdom, needs no other light to light Itself; when the clouds have moved away, the sun, that comes out from behind the screening clouds, needs no other torch to make us to see him, he being in the nature of nothing but a mass of light. Similarly, when the veiling disturbances of the mind and the intellect, caused by our own ignorance of the Self, are stopped, the Ātman, in Its own self-effulgence comes out to shine forth in all glory. Intelligence needs no other intelligence to light Itself.

In the next mantra we have the answer to the question raised in this stanza.



न तत्र सूर्यो भाति न चन्द्रतारकं
नेमा विद्युतो भान्ति कुतोऽयमग्निः ।
तमेव भान्तमनुभाति सर्वं
तस्य भासा सर्वमिदं विभाति ॥ १५ ॥

इति काठकोपनिषदि द्वितीयाध्याये पञ्चमी वल्ली समाप्ता ॥

*na tatra sūryo bhāti na candratāraṇam
nemāvidyuto bhānti kuto'yam-agniḥ,
tameva bhāntamanubhāti sarvaṁ
tasya bhāsā sarvamidam vibhāti. (15)*

iti kāṭhakopaniṣadi dvitīyādhyaṣe pañcamī vallī samāptā.

तत्र – there; सूर्यः – the sun; न भाति – does not shine; न चन्द्रः – nor does the moon; तारकं – (nor do the) stars; न इमा – not these; विद्युतः – lightnings; भान्ति – shine; कुतः – how; अयम् – this; अग्निः – fire; तम् – that; एव – verily; भान्तम् – (when He) shines; अनुभाति – shines after; सर्वं – all; तस्य – by His; भासा – by light; सर्वमिदं – all these; विभाति – shines

15. *The sun does not shine there, nor does the moon, nor do the stars, nor the lightnings and much less this fire. When He shines, everything shines after Him – by His light, all these shine.*

(Thus ends the fifth vallī in the second chapter.)

Even today, long after we have forgotten our own great Bible, the Upaniṣads, we are hearing this mantra almost everyday repeated in all temples and pūjās, since no ritual is generally concluded without chanting this mantra soon after the common and well-known āratī. None of the devotees, or the paṇḍitas has ever come to really understand the message of this stanza, except probably some, who have a surface knowledge of its mere word meaning! Our religion has become hollow and without any significance to us because of our unintelligent way of living our religion. A mere parrot-like repetition of stanzas, in a language unknown to us, without seeking to understand its meaning, in itself will not and cannot give benefit at all. There are some Karma-kāṇḍins and orthodox monsters who claim all powers to mantras and kīrtanas merely repeated, even if the one repeating them knows not their meaning nor understands

their significances! Chinmaya cannot subscribe to this false, unintelligent, hypocritical nonsense. Were it true, why not applaud a gramophone box for the beauty of the song it had sung or pat the shoulders of your radio box congratulating it for the talk it has relayed to you?

tatra (there) – Lord Death is indicating here the realm of the Self which is the land of the Knowledge Absolute. In that plane of divine God-consciousness, there is no need for another agent of light to illumine it. All the sources of physical light are denied in the realm of Truth with this mantra, wherein Lord Death says that there is neither the sun nor the moon nor the stars nor the lightning; and as such where can be the light of fire? In short, there is, in this light, no other light other than Itself. In the sun, there is no need for a torch to illumine it!!

anubhāti (shines after) – Truth is the substratum for all the seeming activities of life. Where life is extinct, the activities of the sense organs, mind and intellect are also at an end. And when these three entities in man have folded themselves, and as it were, rolled out; to that individual, there is no more the sun, the moon, the lightning, or the light of fire. So long as life is in him, he recognises all the sources of light in the physical world. Naturally, it is philosophically evident and logically it can be maintained that the giver of all light (for the sun and other sources of light) is none other than the intelligence of the intellect, the Self. Hence, Lord Death says that all shines after It. By Its light all these shine.

Now that we know the real significance of the stanza, it must be possible for each of us to think for ourselves the voiceless depth of self-evident suggestions, in ordering this mantra to be repeated at the close of every Hindu ritual and sacred religious ceremony. The importance of this stanza is again emphasised in the fact that the same stanza has been repeated in two more Upaniṣads of the ten important ones!¹ Though, in slightly different words, we have the same transcendental idea that the Self is the source of all light, hinted at in the *Bhagavad-gītā*.²

¹ *Muṇḍakopaniṣad*-2.2.10 and *Śvetāśvatara-upaniṣad*-6.14

² *na tadbhāsayate sūryo na śaśāṅko na pāvakaḥ,
yadgatvā na nivartante taddhāma paramaṁ mama. – Bhagavad-gītā*-15.6





SECTION 6 – षष्ठी वल्ली

The path of ādhyātma-yoga further elaborated

ऊर्ध्वमूलोऽवाक्शाख एषोऽश्वत्थः सनातनः ।
तदेव शुक्रं तद् ब्रह्म तदेवामृतमुच्यते ।
तस्मिँल्लोकाः श्रिताः सर्वे तद् नात्येति कश्चन ॥
एतद्वै तत् ॥ १ ॥

*ūrdhvamūlo'vāk-śākha eṣo'śvatthaḥ sanātanaḥ,
tadeva śukraṁ tad-brahma tadevāmṛtamucyate,
tasmiँllokāḥ sritāḥ sarve tadu nātyeti kaścana.
etad-vai tat. (1)*

ऊर्ध्वमूलः – with the roots upwards; अवाक्शाख – with branches downwards; एषः – this; अश्वत्थः – aśvattha (holy fig) tree; सनातनः – ancient; तदेव – that is verily; शुक्रं – pure; तत् – that; ब्रह्म – Brahman; तत् – that; एव – also; अमृतम् – immortal; उच्यते – is called; तस्मिन् – in that; लोकाः – the worlds; श्रिताः – rest; सर्वे – all; तत् – that; उ – verily; अत्येति – transcend; न कश्चन – none; एतत् – this is; वै – verily; तत् – That

1. This is the ancient aśvattha tree whose roots are above and branches (spread) below. That is verily the pure, that is Brahman, and that is also called the Immortal. In that rest all the worlds, and none can transcend It. Verily this is That.

All those who have at least a scrappy knowledge of Sanskrit are advised to get hold of a copy of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya's commentary upon this mantra. It is a piece of joy. Even the great philosopher Śrī Śaṅkarācārya was seemingly carried away into the realm of pure poetry and literature at the beauty of the deep suggestions contained in the above mantra.

Just as the sweet scent of the night flower wafting towards us can give us an idea of not only the presence of the night queen shrub but also the roots that sustain the plant; so too, the Śruti, from an observation of the finite world of names and forms, wants to deduce 'the root of it all' that lies in a region concealed from our superficial observation. Thus, in order to point out an unseen cause for the seen and experienced effects, the scripture is here bringing out a beautiful comparison of the universe projected out from the Reality in the form of an aśvattha tree (pīpala tree). It is also relevant here to remember that in describing the same fig tree, Lord Vyāsa also has devoted three entire stanzas in the opening of the 15th chapter in his masterpiece, *Bhagavad-gītā*.

Śaṅkarācārya, in his commentary, also provides us with a reason why the saṃsāra has been compared to a tree by the Śruti; in Sanskrit the word 'vṛkṣa' means a tree 'because it is felled' (vṛścanāt).

Commonly known to the majority, there is no tree which is so extensive in growth, sturdy in build and long in its duration of life as the pīpala, and the Śruti could not have thought of another tree equally appropriate to compare it with the world of plurality. Generally, the professional writers of cheap bazaar notes, led away by the literal

meaning, explain the tree of saṃsāra as having its roots above and the branches hanging down. This is absurd and even the Śruti statements cannot make any aśvattha tree to do a śīrṣāsana, however much misguided artists may try with colours to represent this misreading of the Śruti texts by Sanskrit paṇḍitas! Śaṅkarācārya has very pointedly hinted at this misunderstanding.

ūrdhvamūla (roots up) – The word ‘ūrdhva’ here does not mean ‘up’ in the sense of geometrical ‘up’ but it is used to indicate the idea of ‘reverence’. Thus, of the many parts of the tree of saṃsāra, the root is much more sacred and hence ūrdhva; the tree of saṃsāra has its roots sucking out its sap from the ‘viṣṇoḥ yat paramaṃ padam’ (the supreme place of Viṣṇu – the all-pervading Ātman).

Again, there can be yet another reason why Śruti has chosen this pīpala tree for her purposes of representing saṃsāra. The very word ‘aśvatthaḥ’ can be liquidated in Sanskrit into three component parts¹ meaning thereby ‘that which will not be tomorrow’. ‘Saṃsāra’ is a word that indicates the world of the finite objects, where death and destruction are the constant happenings; no simpler word would have, more completely and so effectively, indicated the world of perishable objects as the aśvattha.

In spite of our repeated efforts at finding for them sufficient reason to generate their appreciation of this gem of poetry and philosophy, our educated Hindu brethren, in their hardened prejudices against the style and content

¹ aśvatthaḥ (literally) a – not; śvas – tomorrow; sthaḥ – existing; meaning, impermanent.

of the Upaniṣads, might yet find some difficulty in understanding it. Chinmaya may here try to give for them yet another example.

Have you not seen, in your history textbooks, charts representing the line of descendants of the various ruling families? Each of them starts with a great grandsire and then branches out into sons and daughters, who, in their turn, again spread out into an array of grandsons and granddaughters . . . ad infinitum. Don't these printed charts look like a tree with its root up! And they are literally called in English as the charts of family tree! If our modern historians in their matter-of-fact, unpoetic approach to data, can come to use such a poetic idea of a family tree, would you not, if not in sympathy, at least in an intellectual understanding, give the ṛṣis of the Upaniṣads the benefit of doubt!

In short, the Upaniṣad wants us to understand only the simple fact that the finite world, the aśvattha, is itself rooted in Truth and maintains itself from the nourishments drawn from the absolute Truth. The saṁsāra is a 'tree' mainly because it can be cut down and removed once and forever with the firm axe of discrimination (viveka).¹



यदिदं किं च जगत्सर्वं प्राण एजति निःसृतम् ।
महद्भयं वज्रमुद्यतं य एतद्विदुरमृतास्ते भवन्ति ॥ २ ॥

¹ *aśvatthamenam suvirūḍhamūla-
masaṅgaśastreṇa dṛḍhena chittvā. – Gītā-15.3.*

*yad-idam kim ca jagat-sarvam prāṇa ejati niḥsṛtam,
mahad-bhayaṁ vajramudyataṁ ya etad-viduramṛtāste bhavanti. (2)*

यत् – which; इदं – this; किंच – whatever; जगत् – the whole universe; सर्वं – all; प्राणे – the prāṇa being present; एजति – vibrates; निःसृतम् – having emerged (from the Brahman); महत् – great; भयं – terror; वज्रम् – thunderbolt; उद्यतं – uplifted; ये – who; एतत् – this; विदुः – know; अमृताः – immortal; ते – they; भवन्ति – become

2. This whole universe evolved from the Brahman, moves (vibrates) in the prāṇa (in the highest Brahman). That Brahman is a great terror, like an uplifted thunderbolt. Those who know this become immortal.

The same idea described in the previous mantra is brought into a greater relief in this stanza in a more direct and scientific language. Perhaps, Śruti herself realises that in the crowded details of her analogy of the aśvattha tree, the student may be apt to overlook the deep significance contained in it – that the entire tree is rooted in and is maintained by the world of Truth.

prāṇa – It may be interpreted as nominative (prathamā) or as the seventh case (saptamī); it may be interpreted as, ‘the whole universe arose from Brahman and moves in prāṇa’ or as ‘the prāṇa being present (prāṇa sati) the whole universe comes out of Him and vibrates in Him.’

Prāṇa means here the Brahman as the Master of creation, and this eternal Reality is the one source from which the world of appearances has emerged out, in which it is existing and into which at the end of time, it shall merge back.

ejati (vibrates) – Creation and the worlds created are considered by many of the Indian philosophers as so many ‘stresses’ in the Infinite. Modern science in the West has also come to a similar conclusion that the world of matter is entirely constituted of energy units moving at a terrific speed in their eternal vibrations. When an atom was split, the physicists could mechanically discover that it was constituted of the electrons and protons, moving at a high velocity around and about a central motionless neutron. They also found out that, if by some method they could change the frequency of vibrations of the energy particles in the electronic vibrations in an element, they could change one element into another! If the atoms are nothing but energy particles vibrating, and matter is nothing but a mass of molecules, the matter is nothing but energy vibrating!

Now then, it cannot be much of a difficulty for the modern Hindu to accept the statement of this mantra that ‘creation is a motion, a vibration of energy’ and that it is possible for the vibration to maintain itself only if there is a motionless and non-vibrating medium, the absolute Reality. Constant change can certainly give us the delusion of a form – only there must be a constant medium, for the changes to play in or at least a constant axis upon which they can play. Thus, when a lit up joss stick (agarabatti) is rotated fast around the same axis, we can detect the joss stick maintaining itself in the form of a golden circle. The golden circle has no existence except in the consistency of change at the brilliant tip. Similarly, constant vibration of energy in a medium of absolute energy, and maintaining itself within the field of a constant axis, gives us that ocean of sense objects made up of things and beings.

To be sure, this idea seemingly discovered only recently, must have been the common knowledge among the Āryans of the Vaidika period; else Śruti would not have felt satisfied herself by merely mentioning the whole universe vibrates in prāṇa.

mahadbhayam (a great terror) – Nothing in the universe happens haphazardly. Nature moves in rhythm. There is an immutable law that governs the movement of the stars, planets and so on. There is a constancy in the working of all the laws of nature. Everything is scheduled to happen according to some strict commands; as though there is a very severe law maker and a strict maintainer of these laws! In this sense, the scripture states here, that the finite world of names and forms seems to exist and function, so diligently and readily as though the Master of the laws is standing right behind it with a raised whip!

The mantra, on the whole, indicates that the source of all manifestations is not an inert non-existence (as some of the philosophers of schools of Buddhism believe and try to maintain) but that the ultimate source of all lives is an active and dynamic existence, which, in its nature, is pure Intelligence Itself.

Those who know this highest Brahman, the source of all life, the substratum for the eternal play of change, to be the vital factor in themselves, they shall attain immortality!



भयादस्याग्निस्तपति भयात्तपति सूर्यः ।

भयादिन्द्रश्च वायुश्च मृत्युर्धावति पञ्चमः ॥ ३ ॥

bhayādasyāgnistapati bhayāttapati sūryah,

bhayādindraśca vāyuśca mṛtyur-dhāvati pañcamah. (3)

भयात् – from fear; अस्य – of Him; अग्निः – fire; तपति – burns; भयात् – from fear; तपति – burns; सूर्यः – sun; भयात् – from fear; इन्द्रश्च – Indra and; वायुश्च – air and; मृत्युः – death; धावति – proceeds; पञ्चमः – the fifth

3. For fear of Him the fire burns; for fear of Him shines the sun; for fear of Him do Indra, Vāyu and Death, the fifth, proceed (with their respective functions).

If Brahman, the supreme Reality, were not there, not only to declare, by Its will, the law of existence but also to control and govern it, and thus ultimately ensure its smooth functioning, we would not have had, to be sure, such a systematic and scientific consistency in the laws of nature. Had it not been for this eternal fear for the supreme authority of the transcendental Reality, we could not have had any science textbooks, as for that matter, life itself would have been impossible. For example, supposing fire chooses to take a holiday from its nature and thus prove itself to be cold, the milk over the oven probably remain colder than when it was put on the fire even after hours of waiting! No life would have been possible, then, in the sense of a systematic and continuous living for, the planets could then, at their will, stray away from their appointed paths in the heavens! Almost as frequently as we are having motor accidents, train collisions and plane crashes

in these days in our ill organised world, we could have had collision between stars and among planets!

But on the other hand, we are seeing that the universe is running smoothly and harmoniously in a perfect orderly manner. Sun, Fire, Indra, Vāyu and Death are all working with a beautiful team spirit.

This idea that nature strictly keeps herself within the word and spirit of the eternal law due to her fear of the Supreme, is repeated with almost the same vigour if not in the same words in *Taittirīya-upaniṣad*.¹

pañcamah (fifth) – Death is considered the fifth in the direct numerical order. Previously the mantra has already enumerated four different names as Fire, Sun, Indra and Vāyu. So, naturally, Death is the fifth.



इह चेदशकद्बोद्धुं प्राक्शरीरस्य विस्त्रसः ।
ततः सर्गेषु लोकेषु शरीरत्वाय कल्पते ॥ ४ ॥

*iha cedaśakad-boddhuṁ prāk-śarīrasya visrasaḥ,
tataḥ sargeṣu lokeṣu śarīratvāya kalpate. (4)*

इह – here; चेत् – if; अशकत् – is able to; बोद्धुं – to comprehend;
प्राक् – before; शरीरस्य – of the body; विस्त्रसः – death, fall; ततः –
then (otherwise); सर्गेषु लोकेषु – in the world of creatable things;
शरीरत्वाय – to take a body; कल्पते – is made fit, becomes possible

¹ *bhīṣāsmādvātaḥ pavate, bhīṣodeti sūryaḥ, bhīṣāsmādagñiścendraśca,
mṛtyurdhāvati pañcama iti... – Taittirīya-upaniṣad-2.8.1*

4. If here – in this life – one is able to comprehend Him (Brahman) before the death of the body, (he will be Liberated from the bondage of the world); if one is not able to comprehend Him, then one has to take a body (again) in the worlds of creation.

Ignorance can be ended only with knowledge; ignorance and knowledge cannot remain together at one place at the same period of time. Knowledge ends in ignorance, as light ends in darkness.

The ignorance of our real identity has made us identify ourselves with the mind, intellect, and body delusions and this is the start for our egocentric life of pains and limitations. There is no other achievement, more sacred and glorious which a human seeker can achieve, within the duration of his existence as man, than the realisation of his real identity with the unlimited, eternal, absolute Self.

One identifying with the Self during his lifetime here, gains the eternal padavī of deathless perfections. Having realised this real nature, there cannot be, for such an individual, any more of the pains of birth and death. After having woken up from the dream, one need not run to the sideboard to snatch his rifle to shoot down the tiger that hunted him down in his dream! After a dream ride, when the dreamer wakes up, he need not run out to take his dream horse to water! Having woken up from the dream of the egocentric agonies into the waking state of the knowledge of the Self, the God-man will not and need no more repeat the to and fro swinging between the arcs of birth and death.

If an individual fails to realise the eternal nature of his Self during his lifetime, he, after departing from his present manifestation, will have to take up yet another form and come back to this wretched plane of limitations and finiteness. This is true because the ego sense can ultimately end, we have found, only at the final shifting of our present identifications with our body, mind and intellect to a real understanding, born of firsthand experience of the true nature of our eternal Selfhood, which is the source of all life in us. As long as an individual has not come to have this subjective realisation of the Self, so long his ego sense persists, so much so the 'I-ness' and 'my-ness' in him drop off their present physical body, they remain intact together as an 'idea ego' and, in time, it associates itself with another form (body) maintaining and developing its egoness with that chosen form.

Śruti here kindly warns all sincere seekers to strive hard in realising this final mission of life which takes the individual from the mortal levels to the heights of eternal perfection. This, supreme goal is the final fulfilment of the struggle of evolution. Man alone is the sacred creature who has been endowed with the necessary equipments of a sensitive mind, high reasoning capacity, with a judicious and trained application of which, he can deliberately hasten his own evolution. In nature no other creature has this divine freedom to speed up its own evolution.



यथादर्शे तथात्मनि यथा स्वप्ने तथा पितृलोके ।

यथाप्सु परीव ददृशे तथा गन्धर्वलोके छायातपयोरिव ब्रह्मलोके ॥ ५ ॥

*yathādarśe tathātmani yathāśvapne tathā pitṛloke,
yathāpsu parīva dadṛśe tathā gandharvaloke
chāyātapayoriva brahmaloke. (5)*

यथा – as; आदर्शे – in the mirror; तथा – so; आत्मनि – within one's own Self; यथा स्वप्ने – as in dream; तथा पितृलोके – so in the world of forefathers (manes); यथाप्सु – as in the water; परीव ददृशे – seen like reflection (hazy); तथा – and; गन्धर्वलोके – in the world of Gandharvas; छायातपयोरिव – as in light and shade; ब्रह्मलोके – in the world of Brahmā

5. (Brahman can be seen) in the Self as (one sees oneself) in the mirror; in the world of manes, as (one perceives oneself) in dream; in the world of Gandharvas, as (one's reflection) is seen in the water; and in the world of Brahmā (as distinctly separated) as in light and shade.

In every phase of this mantra almost an entire Upaniṣad is packed so that the whole stanza literally seems to bend down with the weight of its own meaning. On the first reading it may suggest to you as an almost clear and plain statement. This is the trick of style of Upaniṣad; the simpler it looks, the more pregnant it would be in its significance.

In the previous mantra, we have been advised that in our life, the greatest achievement would be that of realising our own real nature. Now in this mantra Lord Death is trying to explain to his disciple, Naciketā, how realisation of the Self in the human existence is much more sacred, compared with the possibilities of realisation in the other different planes of existence.

As men, we are living in a plane of Consciousness, where we have certain kinds of experiences which we gain through our sense organs, mind and intellect, when they react with the available external world of sense objects. Just as our experiences of the waking state world are not the same as our experiences in our dreamworld, so too, there can be other planes of Consciousness wherein different degrees of experiences can be our lot. Thus, we have the *pitṛ-loka* (the world of the manes) where the individual has only the mind and intellect equipment and not physical body. Naturally, the experiences gained by the subtle body must be different from our own experiences here, inasmuch as the body with its demands, cravings, pains and joys will colour our experiences to give us, on the whole, a totally different life. Similarly, the experiences in the world of the *Gandharvas* (divine nymphs, instinctively clever in music, dance and such other allied arts) and in the plane of Consciousness called the *Hiranyagarbha* or the *Brahma-loka* (the total mind), must each be totally different from those in all the other worlds. Here Śruti is trying to give the comparative clarity with which the absolute Knowledge can be reached by the seekers in the different planes of existence.

yathādarśe (as in a mirror) – Man, living the life of the mortal, in this world alone can, through the required special practices, come to gain the clearest concept of the absolute Knowledge. Transcending his mind and intellect intuitively, a seeker comes, face to face, with the Truth, the Self or the *Ātman*. At this stage, there is a natural pause for all the thinking students to raise a serious doubt. When one's mind

and intellect have been transcended, how can there be an ego who can come face to face with the centre of all our lives to recognise it? True, the question is quite intelligent, logical and to the mark. This question has been answered here in the simple looking comparison with the reflection in a mirror.

Friends, mirror gazing must be quite familiar to everyone of you, as no day can pass, in this era of daily shaving, without your looking into a mirror. But probably, you have never tried to analyse the exact moment of your understanding your reflection. Let this sādhu try to help you.

Supposing for a moment, that you are standing in front of a mirror. Now, seeing your reflection in the mirror what do you exactly understand? If, for example, your reflection showed that it needs a shaving badly, would you then start shaving the reflection in the mirror or would you do it on your own face? That is, though you are looking out into the reflection in the mirror, you are in fact, understanding not the reflection but yourself.

Similarly, when the mind and the intellect have been transcended in the last moments of the white heat of meditation, the individual ego, peeping over its own limitations, as it were, comes face to face with the eternal Self and when thus, the highly evolved ego comes to reflect the light of the eternal Knowledge, the reflection merges itself in a process of knowing, to become one with the Self. Seeing the reflection we do not actually come to know so much the reflection as, through it, we come to understand the source of the reflection, our own face.

If once we have grasped this point clearly in all its pregnant import, we shall easily understand the other comparisons, used in explaining the different degrees of clarity with which a seeker can realise his own Self, in the different planes of Conscious existence.

All those who have been regularly following so far the yajña discourses, are sure to understand the depth of the significances in the comparisons as in dream, so in the world of forefathers; and as in water, so in the world of Gandharavas. Chinmaya does not wish to commit the sin of repetition.

chāyātapayoriva (as in light and shade) – In Brahma-loka, the Śruti explains, the knowledge of the Self can be certainly most clear, as clear as black letters would be against a white background! In fact Śruti is unequivocally emphatic in her assertion that Self-realisation in the world of the cosmic mind is the clearest. But we should not forget that this plane of Consciousness is very difficult to be reached, for, this is the lot given to such ego centres who have come to gain the required merits through a synthetic yoga of both karma and upāsana (worship and meditation). The one, having reached the Brahma-loka, according to the scriptures, remains there enjoying for long the subtlest joys of that world, until at last, ultimately, guided by the Creator Himself, he attains immortality, when that plane of Consciousness gets folded back into the Absolute, during the periodical pralayas (deluge). This process of Self-realisation is termed as ‘Kramamukti’ (Liberation by stages) in the textbooks of Vedānta.



इन्द्रियाणां पृथग्भावमुदयास्तमयौ च यत् ।
पृथगुत्पद्यमानानां मत्वा धीरो न शोचति ॥ ६ ॥

*indriyāṇāṃ prthagbhāvam-udayāstamayau ca yat,
prthagutpadyamānānāṃ matvā dhīro na śocati. (6)*

इन्द्रियाणां – of the senses; पृथक् – distinct nature, separate existence; भावम् – nature; उदयास्तमयौ – rising and setting; च – and; यत् – that which; पृथक् – separately; उत्पद्यमानानां – being produced in origin; मत्वा – having understood, known; धीरः – the wise man; न शोचति – grieves not

6. A wise man, having understood that the senses separately produced and also their rising and setting are distinct from the Ātman, grieves no more.

One who has read the previous mantra and has thoroughly understood its significances shall surely ask the question, ‘Why after all, should one try to realise the eternal Self in the human life?’ The answer is given by Śruti Bhagavati in this mantra.

The sense organs are distinctly separate from eternal and changeless Truth that resides in us. The senses are separate from the Ātman because they are effects produced out of certain causes, while the Ātman is the very uncaused cause. Again, the five different sense organs are each different, not only in themselves, but in their very original causes; the five fundamental elements.

Not only they are in themselves thus different, and arise from different causes, but also they are eternally changing as they react from moment-to-moment differently

with the different objects that come in contact with them! In the waking state they are all quite receptive and available for their individual expressions; while the moment the individual is asleep, the capacity of his sense organs to react with their objects, folds up into a state of dormancy (udaya-asta-mayau, meaning, rising and setting) and the folded up abilities and capacities in the indriyas seem to manifest themselves all at once, the moment the individual wakes up from his sleep!!

A wise discriminating man, differentiating between the eternal factor, the Ātman, and the ever-changing play of passing expressions in his indriyas, comes to grieve no more. All our sorrows in life are due to our lending ourselves to the misunderstanding that we are the ego centres and thereby becoming ourselves victims to all our mental demands, intellectual assertions, and sense appetites. In the right knowledge of our total independence from the winding chains of these limitations, we shall reach a state of existence where sorrow or grief has no meaning. The state of perfect bliss, eternally untouched by sorrow, is the padavī (status) that Śruti promises to one who dares follow the razor path of knowledge and realises the Self in this very birth, as she called upon us to do in the previous two mantras. That a Self-realised soul would eternally be beyond all sorrows is an oft repeated statement in our sacred scriptural literature. The knower of the Self goes beyond the shores of sorrow – says another Upaniṣad.¹



¹ taratī śokam-ātmavit – Chāndogya-upaniṣad-7.1.3

इन्द्रियेभ्यः परं मनो मनसः सत्त्वमुत्तमम् ।
सत्त्वादधि महानात्मा महतोऽव्यक्तमुत्तमम् ॥ ७ ॥

*indriyebhyaḥ paraṁ mano manasaḥ sattvamuttamam,
sattvād-adhi mahānātmā mahato'vyaktamuttamam. (7)*

इन्द्रियेभ्यः – than the senses; परं – beyond, than; मनः – the mind;
मनसः – than the mind; सत्त्वम् – the intellect; उत्तमम् – is superior,
better; सत्त्वात् – than the intellect; अधि – beyond; महानात्मा –
the great Ātman; महतः – than the great Ātman; अव्यक्तम् – the
unmanifested; उत्तमम् – is superior.

*7. Beyond the senses, is the mind; beyond the mind, is the intellect;
beyond the intellect, is the great Ātman; superior to the great
Ātman, is the unmanifest (prakṛti).*



अव्यक्तात्तु परः पुरुषो व्यापकोऽलिङ्ग एव च ।
यं ज्ञात्वा मुच्यते जन्तुरमृतत्वं च गच्छति ॥ ८ ॥

*avyaktāt-tu paraḥ puruṣo vyāpako'liṅga eva ca,
yaṁ jñātvā mucyate jantur-amṛtatvaṁ ca gacchati. (8)*

अव्यक्तात् – than the unmanifested; तु – also; परः – beyond;
पुरुषः – is the Puruṣa; व्यापकः – all-pervading; अलिङ्गः –
devoid of all distinctive marks; एव – verily; च – and;
यं – whom; ज्ञात्वा – having realised (known); मुच्यते – is
emancipated; जन्तुः – the creature; अमृतत्वं – immortality;
च – and; गच्छति – he attains

8. And verily beyond the unmanifest (prakṛti) is the all-pervading Puruṣa, devoid of all distinctive marks, knowing whom the creature (the knower) is emancipated and he attains immortality.

These two mantras are taken together because we had already commented exhaustively on all the points raised in the first part of the second stanza. As pointed out earlier (in 1.3.10), here again the mantra is only repeating what had already been said regarding the ascending spiral that takes us from the grossest to the subtlest principle in us.

The Puruṣa or the subtlest of the subtle factor in us, is explained here as vyāpaka (all-pervading) and alīṅga (without distinctive characteristics, properties and so on).

Ātman being the subtlest of the subtle, we have discussed before, it must necessarily be all-pervading tattva.

In the Sanskrit logician's vocabulary, the word 'liṅga' has a particular connotation, a scientific import and is used in philosophical discussions only at such places where the philosopher wants to point out its scientific meaning. Much of our knowledge is made out of our capacity to infer. Almost all our knowledge of things not yet seen is derived through the source of knowledge called 'inference'. When there is a lot of smoke rising from a point in the distant range of hills, we, from our point of observation, infer that there is fire on the hill. The sign or the distinctive mark, namely, smoke, observing which, we come to the definite conclusion of the things is called the 'liṅga' in the logician's terminology.

With this knowledge of the exact connotation of the word, we can now easily understand the import of the scripture when she says that the Puruṣa is devoid of any liṅga. It means that there are no properties or qualities or such other indicative signs by which we can directly perceive, and, therefore, come to recognise the Self in us.

He who realises this Self through a subjective experiencing, not only gets liberated from the shackles of mortal limitations, but also, the Śruti asserts, most surely, reaches the deathless state of eternal existence. The knower of the Brahman becomes Brahman¹ is the incessant declaration of all Śrutis.



न संदृशे तिष्ठति रूपमस्य
न चक्षुषा पश्यति कश्चनैनम् ।
हृदा मनीषा मनसाभिव्लृप्तो
य एतद्विदुरमृतास्ते भवन्ति ॥ ९ ॥

*na sandrśe tiṣṭhati rūpamasya
na cakṣuṣā paśyati kaścanainam,
hṛdā manīṣā manasābhiklṛpto
ya etad-viduramṛtāste bhavanti. (9)*

संदृशे – to the sight (form) as an object of vision; न तिष्ठति – is not available; रूपम् – form; अस्य – his; चक्षुषा – with the eyes; पश्यति – sees; न कश्चन – none; एनम् – Him; हृदा – by that which resides in the heart; मनीषा – by the intellect (that controls the mind);

¹ *brahma ved brahmaiva bhavati – Muṇḍakopaniṣad-3.2.9*

मनसा – by the intuition; अभिक्लृप्तः – is revealed; ये – who; एतत् – this; विदुः – know; ते – they; अमृताः – immortal; भवन्ति – become

9. His form is not to be seen. No one beholds Him with the eye. By controlling the mind by the intellect and incessant meditation He is revealed. Those who know this (Brahman) become immortal.

That the Self is beyond the fields of the sense organs and the mind and the intellect has, by now, been very often repeated by the Śruti in different mantras. If none of these instruments of cognition, feeling and understanding is available for the seeker in realising the Supreme, the ill-informed aspirant is apt to feel despair and may throw up all his attempts to live the Life Divine, saying that the goal promised by the Śrutis is an impossibility. Hence, this mantra is explaining to us the last leap with which the seeker, during his meditations, crosses over the frontiers of his mind and intellect and reaches the land of Truth.

na cakṣuṣā paśyati (none can see Him with the eyes) – Here the word ‘eye’ is a representative word (upalakṣaṇa) which, in its true meaning in the mantra, indicates all the sense organs. The Upaniṣad is here clearly and pointedly making the daring statement that God will not present Himself to his devotees, for them to ‘see’ Him with their naked limited sense organs of vision. All visions are delusory hallucinations of the mind, however satisfying and gloriously divine they may seem to be.

The only method by which a seeker can realise his Self is through the faculty of intuition which is now lying dormant in man’s intellect. The intellect resides, according to the poetic Śruti, in the cave of the heart, and from its glorious

seat of activities, controls the workings of the mind. When the mind is silent, the intellect gains an inner peace. An intellect, thus in complete peace dies itself away or disappears leaving behind, a newly born potency in us called 'intuition'. It is with this intuition that a seeker comes to realise his Self. Intuition is nothing but 'the capacity to know the knowledge'. And knowing the Self is but the Self becoming aware of Itself.

For purposes of emphasis Śruti is again repeating that the one who has, during his sojourn here, come to rediscover himself to be nothing other than the pure Consciousness, presiding in him as his own Self, shall himself become immortal, and thus get away from the whirl of births and deaths.



यदा पञ्चावतिष्ठन्ते ज्ञानानि मनसा सह ।
बुद्धिश्च न विचेष्टति तामाहुः परमां गतिम् ॥ १० ॥

*yadā pañcāvatiṣṭhante jñānāni manasā saha,
buddhiśca na viceṣṭati tāmāhuḥ paramāṁ gatim. (10)*

यदा – when; पञ्च – the five; अवतिष्ठन्ते – are at rest; ज्ञानानि – organs of knowledge; मनसा सह – together with the mind; बुद्धिः – the intellect; च – and; न विचेष्टति – ceases functioning; ताम् – that; आहुः – they call; परमां – the highest; गतिम् – state

10. When the five organs of knowledge are at rest together with the mind, and when the intellect ceases functioning (becomes calm) that state they call the highest state.

Here we have the clearest exposition as far as language and intellect can go, of that state of eternal auspiciousness experienced, when the soul meets the Soul (samādhī). When the five sense organs are perfectly controlled, naturally, the mind is devoid of almost ninety percent of its activities. What little field the mind has now to get itself agitated in, is constituted of its stored away memories and self-created imaginations. When even these agitations are controlled, we reach the state explained in the mantra, the state when the sense organs are at rest along with the mind. Even this is not sufficient. For at this state, the intellect will be throbbing, though of course it will be very feeble, with its own ideas and ideals. The Upaniṣad wants us to reach a state where the sense organs, the mind and the intellect are all at rest. And this state is defined by the Śruti as the state of vitally experiencing the supreme absolute Reality, the Self.

As a matter of fact, have we not, almost everyone of us, experienced a state, wherein our sense organs, mind and intellect are not at play? In sleep we all know that neither our indriyas nor our manas nor our buddhi comes to interfere with our peaceful rest with their endless death dances; then, are we not experiencing the Reality during all the occasions when we are plunged in deep sleep? 'If the condition of sleep be the condition of Reality, is the Upaniṣad asking us to be nothing more than idlers, sleeping round the clock all days of our lives?', thus ask the skeptics.

Such and other similar questions would rise up in the mind of the uninitiated when they superficially read the mantra now under discussion entirely in itself. In fact

this mantra has no independent existence without the total knowledge we have so far acquired from the learned discourses of Lord Death. We must read this stanza specially in the light of the previous one.

There is a lot of difference between sleep and the state of self meeting the Self. The condition of samādhi is often explained to us as something very near sleep, because living as we are in a very gross plane of Consciousness, the God-men of the Upaniṣad could not explain to us their transcendental experiences, but in terms of our own world of limited experiences. The nearest state they could find, which man is enjoying and which can be favourably compared with the state of samādhi, is sleep; in the sense, while we are sleeping, our sense organs, mind and intellect are at rest. The comparison is only so far as it explains this common similarity.

During moments of God-consciousness, the individual transcends his mind and intellect, to reach the land of the eternal Consciousness, while man in sleep has only folded up his mind, intellect and sense organs for the time being, and finds himself reaching the dark land of the unconsciousness! The one in sleep is drowned in the darkness of ignorance; the one in samādhi is in the sunshine of Knowledge. The sleeper is a slave in a negative living, while the knower is a Master in a positive existence. These ideas are hinted in the unwritten space between the above two stanzas.

In order to delve deep into our own bosom and light up the match of intuition, so that it may flare up and blow off the veiling walls of mental and intellectual disturbances,

and thus finally reveal the self unto the Self, what exactly is the process to be pursued? This question is answered in the following mantra –



तां योगमिति मन्यन्ते स्थिरामिन्द्रियधारणाम् ।
अप्रमत्तस्तदा भवति योगो हि प्रभवाप्ययौ ॥ ११ ॥

*tām yogamiti manyante sthirāmindriyadhāraṇām,
apramattastadā bhavati yogo hi prabhavāpyayau. (11)*

तां – that; योगमिति – as yoga; मन्यन्ते – they call, regard; स्थिराम् – firm; इन्द्रियधारणाम् – control of the senses; अप्रमत्तः – free from all the vagaries of the mind; तदा – then; भवति – becomes; योगः हि – for the yoga is; प्रभवाप्ययौ – grows and decays

11. *The firm control of the senses they regard as yoga. Then the yogin becomes free from all the vagaries of the mind; for the yoga is subject to growth and decay.*

The method of practice pursued by a student of Vedānta in order to develop his intuitive power and with that to come to realise ultimately his own Self and thus become immortal is being explained here. The process of self-development and self-perfection is yoga; if truly practised, yoga promises us its goal to be godhood. Here, the scripture clearly exclaims that yoga means, in its practical application, the firm control of the sense organs. A certain amount of sense control comes as a matter of habit to one who has come to live the discreet rules of decent life; such an individual will not like the

barbarian in him to walk out of his form, to abscond or to seduce, although his mind may get tempted by the charms of his neighbour!

An individual is helped much in his self-control, no doubt, if the spirit of his age is one that follows the dharmas. If we are finding today, a greater dose of barbarism and cruelties among our children who are coming out of the universities than it was among our forefathers of a couple of generations back, we know for certain the source of the low negativities among the modern educated class. These children, innocent victims of the spirit of the age, are not to be condemned at all for the life of sensations, they are seeking or the voluptuous excess they are tempted to enjoy! If they are to be condemned, much more shall we condemn ourselves, for, certainly, we have, through our own commissions and omissions, contributed much to the poisonous spirit of the present. Flouting truth and breaking the codes of morality and ethics in conscious acts of our own arrogances, we have allowed the spirit of our times to fall so low from its ideal peak to reach the lowest depths of today's desperations.

Fortunately, in the Vaidika period they maintained a strict code of the dharmas. Sanātana-dharma was the spirit of that age; and the descendants for a long time, till the recent present, have been, by a superfine system of communal living and through an ordered and rigid system of social values, trying to keep up the spirit of Sanātana-dharma. If there is yet a greater dose of individual inner joy experienced by the millions in our Indian villages, in spite of their poverty, starvation, death and disease, we

have only to thank the ever blessing time tested system of happy living called the Sanātana-dharma. Compared with a modern citizen in the greatest of our cities, New York, we can definitely say that, mentally speaking, the poor Indian ryot is, any day, enjoying a greater share of inward peace and joy than his American brother. Śānti is the product of contentment and not the ghastly child born of sensuous flirtations with sense objects.

Apologies for this digression. The amount of sense control a man comes to enjoy depends much upon the spirit of the very age he is living in. In the penultimate state of self-development, the individual gains more and more control over his sense organs through his practice of self-control. Certainly, the final and total control, over the indriyas, comes only from the moment of full realisation of the Self (param dṛṣṭvā nivartate).

Yoga, to a student of Vedānta, starts with and is continued in self-control. To him the extreme development of his powers of concentration through a successful achievement in the control of his sense organs is the greatest of tapas (aikāgryam paramaṁ tapaḥ).

Control of the sense organs does not mean merely the negative idea of taking our sense organs away from their sense objects. This is only half the battle. Success can be achieved in self-control only when our minds are fixed firmly in steady concentration and meditation upon the Ātman.

At this time of his self-evolution, the yogin becomes careful and does not allow his mind to fall back into its usual

ruts of sensuous thinking. For, a true student of Vedānta knows fully well that unless he is very careful, the control gained over his senses might, at any time, get lost in the severe temptations of passing moments; especially so when the yogin lives in the same accustomed plane of sense objects. Śruti kindly warns, in her own words, how easy it is even for the highly developed students of yoga to get themselves lost, in the midst of their own successes, if even for a moment they become careless. Indeed, the path of knowledge, dangerous but the shortest, is a razor path wherein a slip means total annihilation.



नैव वाचा न मनसा प्राप्तुं शक्यो न चक्षुषा ।
अस्तीति ब्रुवतोऽन्यत्र कथं तदुपलभ्यते ॥ १२ ॥

*naiva vācā na manasā prāptuṁ śakyo na cakṣuṣā,
astīti bruvato'nyatra katham tadupalabhyate. (12)*

नैव – not verily; वाचा – by speech; न मनसा – not by mind; प्राप्तुं – to be reached; शक्यः – is easy; न चक्षुषा – not by the eye; अस्ति – He is; इति – thus; ब्रुवतः – from those who say; अन्यत्र – otherwise; कथं – how; तत् – that; उपलभ्यते – is Realised

12. (The Self) cannot be reached by speech, nor by mind or nor even by the eye. How can It be Realised otherwise than from those who say, 'He is'?

The Ātman is the controller of the entire mechanism of life. Just as a driver, while driving the car, cannot get himself

run over by the same car, so also the sense organs, mind and intellect functioning because of the Life Centre behind them cannot turn themselves upon the very Ātman and know Him as one of the objects of their cognition, feeling or understanding!

Naturally, Lord Death here in his exclamations conveys to his dear disciple the accepted belief in Vedānta that there is no other source of knowing the existence of the Ātman than the sacred divine words of the scriptural declarations, (śabda pramāṇam) and their living symbols, the Realised Saints. Whatever arguments you may bring out in favour of the existence of the one Ātman in all living forms, there can be equally efficient, intellectual and metaphysical arguments to meet and completely deny the arguments of a seer and prove just the opposite – the non-existence of the Ātman! No amount of metaphysical arguments can help a seeker to reach the absolute Truth. Every seeker will have to start his own pilgrimage with his indomitable courage and faith in the words of his Master.



अस्तीत्येवोपलब्धव्यस्तत्त्वभावेन चोभयोः ।
अस्तीत्येवोपलब्धस्य तत्त्वभावः प्रसीदति ॥ १३ ॥

*astītyevopalabdhavyas-tattvabhāvena cobhayoḥ,
astītyevopalabdhasya tattvabhāvaḥ prasīdati. (13)*

अस्ति – is (being) existing; इति – thus; एव – alone; उपलब्धव्यः – is to be Realised; तत्त्वभावेन – as the Truth, Reality; च – and; उभयोः

– of the two; अस्तीत्येवोपलब्धस्य – of that very Self which was earlier Realised as existing; तत्त्वभावः – the true (transcendental) nature; प्रसीदति – becomes manifest

13. *He should be known to exist as 'be' (asti) and also as He really is. Of these two, to him (seeker), who knows Him to exist, His true nature becomes manifest.*

Though the stanza will read quite a riddle to the not well initiated, it is a direct statement to all those who know the śāstra; and this sādhu is sure that all of you in this yajñāsālā are today really full blown Vedāntins to whom this passage must be automatically clear.

The Ātma-caitanya can be Realised either as conditioned in Its manifestations or in Itself, and as such without any of Its attributes and, therefore, as a pure Witness of all the states of Consciousness. At many places during His discourses Lord Death had already pointed out to Naciketā, that a meditator meditating upon the symbol of Truth, Om, considering it to represent the lower Brahman, shall attain the joys of the Hiraṇyagarbha; and if, on the other hand, one meditates upon 'Om' as a symbol of the attributeless, pure Consciousness, the practitioner fulfils his meditations and actually realises in him the absolute and the all-pervading Reality. Śrī Śaṅkarācārya in his commentary comments upon this stanza in the true spirit of the very textbook.

Many of you might find, if you are following the Ramakrishna Math edition or the Yoga Vedānta Forest University publication of Rishikesh, that both of them had felt almost an unnecessary urge to find a defect in Śrī

Śaṅkarācārya's commentary! We, however find it difficult to accept this amendment which they have suggested.

Śrī Śaṅkarācārya comments upon this mantra and says that the Śruti is here warning the seekers against meditating upon Truth as manifested with attributes, and that she is vigorously advocating the meditation upon the absolute Truth, unmanifest and attributeless.

According to the above textbooks, Śaṅkarācārya's commentary falls short of the mark, and that a closer hit would have been gained by directly explaining the mantra to hint at a warning that the meditator should meditate upon Truth as existence (asti) and not as non-existence (nāsti), as some of the philosophers of the schools of Buddhism maintain along with a section of the Indian logicians (Naiyāyikas).

He who realises the Ātman as the very essence of existence, has realised the Ātman. In thus realising, the successful seeker in his meditations comes to contact himself with a plane of Consciousness, wherein, he realises the source of all life to be pure Existence alone. 'Existence in Itself' is a term used to differentiate the existence of a thing from the Existence as such. 'Existence of a thing' is well-known to us; but here the existence is known in its qualified or conditioned state.

Truth is the subjective knowledge of existence as such to be the very nature of the Knowledge Absolute. The pure state of 'being' (kevala astitva bhāva) is declared in the Upaniṣads as the essence of the Self-realisation moment. He who reaches this state of Knowledge reaches the supreme goal of life and

risers from the seat of meditation, not as the very same mortal who went to it, but as a God-man upon earth.



यदा सर्वे प्रमुच्यन्ते कामा येऽस्य हृदि श्रिताः ।
अथ मर्त्योऽमृतो भवत्यत्र ब्रह्म समश्नुते ॥ १४ ॥

*yadā sarve pramucyante kāmā ye'sya hr̥di śritāḥ,
atha martyo'mṛto bhavatyatra brahma samaśnute. (14)*

यदा – when; सर्वे – all; प्रमुच्यन्ते – are destroyed; कामाः – desires; ये – which; अस्य – his; हृदि – in the heart; श्रिताः – dwelling; अथ – then; मर्त्यः – the mortal; अमृतः – immortal; भवति – becomes; अत्र – even here (in this body); ब्रह्म – Brahman; समश्नुते – he attains

14. *When all the desires that dwell in the heart are destroyed, then the mortal becomes immortal, and he attains Brahman even here.*

The state of desirelessness is the state of Kaivalya or Illumination. That state can be reached even while the individual lives his life within his mortal form. Here Śruti is amply clear in her support of the Advaitin's claim that man can realise godhood in this very birth and reach the state called 'Jīvanmukti'. We have discussed in *Kenopaniṣad* that there is a school of thinkers who believe that the final state of Realisation can come only in the very last moments of life and that after Realisation the body falls off; this school believes only what is technically termed as the 'Videhamukti' (Liberation after death).



यदा सर्वे प्रभिद्यन्ते हृदयस्येह ग्रन्थयः ।

अथ मर्त्योऽमृतो भवत्येतावद्ध्यनुशासनम् ॥ १५ ॥

*yadā sarve prabhidhyante hṛdayasyeha granthayaḥ,
atha martyo'mṛto bhavatyetāvaddhyanuśāsanam. (15)*

यदा – when; सर्वे – all; प्रभिद्यन्ते – get shattered, are destroyed;
हृदयस्य – of the heart (intellect); इह – here (in this body); ग्रन्थयः
– knots; अथ – then; मर्त्यः – the mortal; अमृतः भवति – becomes
immortal; एतावत् – this much alone; हि – indeed; अनुशासनम्
– instructions

15. *When all the knots of the heart are destroyed here (even while
a man is alive), then the mortal becomes immortal. This much
alone is the instruction (of all the Upaniṣads).*

This stanza is a continuation of the idea given out in the
previous mantra.

hṛdayagranthi (the knots of the heart) – This is a philosophical
concept entertained by the Vedāntins. According to them
the avidyā (nescience), meaning, the self forgetfulness of
man of his own true eternal nature, is the cause of all his
continued delusions and superimpositions. In the darkness,
we misunderstand a piece of rope to be a snake; the serpent
here is risen from our 'not understanding the true nature of
the rope'. And now once having seen the serpent, we continue
superimposing upon it a length, a height, a girth, a hood and
such other attributes of the non-existent serpent. Similarly,
man, not recognising his real nature (in the ignorance of his
true nature) gets agitated with kāma (desire) and these very
desires, in their attempts to fulfil themselves among the world

of sense objects, become the karma (action)! Thus avidyā in the spiritual plane is itself the 'desire' in the mental plane, which again, are themselves modified into 'action' in the outer world of objects. 'Every action has its reaction' and thus, in order to reap the reactions, the ego centres escape from their present forms through the back doors of death, only to re-enter in newer forms through the front gates of birth!

The bond of avidyā (nescience), kāma (desire), and karma (action) are together called 'the knots of the heart' in philosophy of Vedānta.

When a human being, during his lifetime, breaks asunder these bonds, he, in fact, ends his ignorance. Ignorance can be ended only with Knowledge. Thus the knots of the heart break down at the dawn of Knowledge; Liberation comes with Knowledge (jñānenaiva tu kaivalyam).

For purpose of emphasis śruti herein again reasserts the view of Jīvanmukti advocated by Śrī Śaṅkarācārya and his followers. Man becomes God upon earth, in his perfection of Knowledge, gained through his own self-efforts, during his lifetime, even while living within his own flesh and bones.



शतं चैका च हृदयस्य नाड्य-
स्तासां मूर्धानमभिनिःसृतैका ।
तयोर्ध्वमायन्नमृतत्वमेति
विष्वङ्ङन्या उत्क्रमणे भवन्ति ॥ १६ ॥

*śataṁ caikā ca hrdayasya nāḍya-
stāsāṁ mūrdhānam-abhiniḥ-sṛtaikā,
tayordhvamāyannamṛtatvameti
viṣvaṁnanyā utkramaṇe bhavanti. (16)*

शतं चैका च – hundred and one; हृदयस्य – of the heart; नाड्यः – nerves; तासां – of them; मूर्धानम् – towards the crown of the head; अभिनिः-सृता – penetrates, goes out; एका – one (that is suṣumnā); तया – (through) them; ऊर्ध्वम् – upwards; आयन् – going; अमृतत्वम् – immortality; एति – attains; विष्वक् – different; अन्या – others; उत्क्रमणे भवन्ति – cause worldly states, that is, death

16. Hundred and one are the nerves of the heart; of them one (i.e. suṣumnā) penetrates the crown of the head. Going upwards through that (nerve) one attains immortality. But the others lead (the departed) differently.

At this stage of your knowledge of Indian philosophy you all may find it not too easy to follow the meaning of this mantra, which is one of the rock bottom foundations in the philosophy of yoga. A much more detailed analysis of the spiritual body encased within our physical form is supplied to us by some of the other Upaniṣads. In the Vaidika age probably, there was wide currency for this knowledge that Lord Death is here only hinting at the particular creed in a passing statement. Chinmaya feels that it would not be adding anything to your total understanding of this Upaniṣad by a cumbersome and exhaustive explanation of this mantra.

However, we may touch upon the problem. The subtle spiritual body is believed to be constituted of some 101 subtle

nerves which the surgeon's scalpel shall never dissect nor his eyes ever see! Of them, the most important is the suṣumnā, which runs parallel to the backbone all along its length and penetrating the top bone, called the apex, extends itself upto the centre of the human crown. The sensitiveness of the top centre portion of the crown can be very well experienced by ourselves! Especially in a new born child, one can feel the heart beat very regularly at the place.

Whatever may be its physiological explanation and relative position, as far as you, the seekers in the path of knowledge, are concerned, it is sufficient to know that the ego centre of a meditator who has realised during life, the apara Brahman (relative Truth), at the time of his death, escapes through the suṣumnā and, crossing distinct regions of experiences, reaches Brahma-loka from where, ultimately at the end of the kalpa, with the dissolution of the world of experience, it reaches the supreme state of Realisation.

As for the one who had realised the eternal, all-pervading Truth in its attributeless pure essence even while living in the body form, becomes a Jīvanmukta. To such a jñānī even the Śruti denies all passage of journey (na tasya prāṇaḥ utkrāṃanti). By knowing Brahman he becomes Brahman. Such a complete and total Liberation is called Kaivalyamukti.



अङ्गुष्ठमात्रः पुरुषोऽन्तरात्मा
सदा जनानां हृदये संनिविष्टः ।
तं स्वाच्छरीरात्प्रवृहन्मुञ्जादिवेषीकां धैर्येण ।
तं विद्याच्छुक्रममृतं तं विद्याच्छुक्रममृतमिति ॥ १७ ॥

*aṅguṣṭhamātraḥ puruṣo'ntarātmā
sadā janānām hṛdaye sanniviṣṭaḥ,
taṁ svāccharīrāt-pravṛṇen muñjādiveṣikāṁ dhairyena,
taṁ vidyācchukram-amṛtaṁ taṁ vidyācchukram-amṛtamiti. (17)*

अङ्गुष्ठमात्रः – of the size of a thumb; पुरुषः – Puruṣa; अन्तरात्मा – the inner Self; सदा – always; जनानां – of beings; हृदये – in the heart; संनिविष्टः – seated, dwelling; तं – him; स्वात् – one's own; शरीरात् – from the body; प्रवृहेत् – (should) draw, separate; मुञ्जात् – from the reed (rush grass); इव – like; इषीकां – the central stalk (pith); धैर्येण – with steadiness, perseverance; तं – him; विद्यात् – (should) know; शुक्रम् – pure; अमृतं – immortal; तं – him; विद्यात् – know; शुक्रम् – pure; अमृतम् – immortal; इति – thus

17. *The Puruṣa of the size of a thumb, the inner Self, is ever seated in the heart of all living beings. One should draw Him out from one's own body with steadiness, as one draws the pith (central stalk) from a reed (rush grass). Know Him as pure and immortal, yes, know Him as the pure, the immortal.*

We have already discussed in the earlier mantras, the concept of the supreme Reality as a mere presence, 'in the shape of one's own thumb' residing in the centre of one's heart. We noted there that the size and shape have been given to the Self to facilitate our meditations, during the earlier stages of the path of dhyāna. In fact the Ātman is formless although here the Self is described as having a shape and a form. This is only for the purpose of providing the seekers with a prop for their mind at meditation, to concentrate upon.

It is quite appropriate that Lord Death should conclude his declaration of Upaniṣads to his disciple, Naciketā, with a direct call upon him to continue his meditations and discriminate the real divine presence in the centre of the centre, from the unreal concentric coating of matter, which the Spirit has seemingly put on to play its game of hide-and-seek! Beyond the five kośas (sheaths) lies the Spirit.

The analogy employed here (to show how through discrimination, one reaches the final state of the Self – cognising the Self) is, true to the style of the Upaniṣads, most emphatic and voluminously self expressive. Naciketā, and through Naciketā the entire world of seekers, is advised to extricate the element of absolute Consciousness, the pure Cit essence, from the delusory consciousness of the body, by continuous and deep practices of discrimination and meditation.

That during meditation, one should not, in the least, strain oneself, is so vividly brought out by the analogy of ‘drawing out the pith from the reed’. The reed itself is the most delicate of plants, and its stalk is more so; and to draw out this flimsy and subtle pith from its outer envelopments constituted of the stalks of the leaves themselves, is a delicate act, which needs a softness of touch, a measured and practised application of force, and a subtle silky deftness in handling entire process!

Pure Consciousness, that is the controller and the director of all physical, mental and intellectual activities in a human being, is the soul or the Ātman. The Upaniṣad concludes with

the repeated assertion that we must know Him to be pure and immortal. He is 'pure' in the sense that impurities of the mind as kāma (desires), krodha (anger), lobha (avarice) and so on, are not in Him. He is 'immortal' inasmuch as He is the eternal, unborn Truth, all-pervading and the uncaused cause of all effects seen in His manifestations!



मृत्युप्रोक्तां नचिकेतोऽथ लब्ध्वा
विद्यामेतां योगविधिं च कृत्स्नम् ।
ब्रह्मप्राप्तो विरजोऽभूद्विमृत्यु-
रन्योऽप्येवं यो विदध्यात्ममेव ॥ १८ ॥

इति काठकोपनिषदि द्वितीयाध्याये षष्ठी वल्ली समाप्ता ॥

*mṛtyuproktāṁ nachiketo'tha labdhvā
vidyāmetāṁ yogavidhiṁ ca kṛtsnam,
brahmaprāpto virajo'bhūd-vimṛtyu-
ranyo'pyevam yo vidadhyātmameva. (18)*

iti kāṭhakopaniṣadi dvitīyādhyāye ṣaṣṭhī vallī samāptā.

मृत्युप्रोक्तां – instructed by Death; नचिकेतः – Naciketā; अथ – then; लब्ध्वा – having attained; विद्याम् – knowledge; एतां – this; योगविधिं – process of yoga; च – also; कृत्स्नम् – the whole ब्रह्मप्राप्तः – knower of Brahman; विरजः – free from all impurities; अभूत् – became, was; विमृत्युः – free from death (meaning desire and passion etc.); अन्यः – any one; अपि – also; एवं – thus; यः – who; वित् – knows; अध्यात्मम् – the inner Self; एव – thus

18. *Naciketā, having been so instructed by Lord Death in this knowledge and in the whole process of yoga, became free from all impurities and death, and attained Brahman; and so anyone too will attain who knows thus the inner Self.*

(Thus ends the sixth vallī in the second chapter)

The previous stanza with its repetition in its last line and the particle 'iti' had already given us the indication that the Upaniṣad had ended. This mantra can, therefore, be only interpreted as the words of Śruti Bhagavatī herself. Naciketā, after listening to the entire advices of his Master from Upaniṣad, and having acquired a thorough knowledge of the technique (yoga vidhi) of self-perfection by which he can come to experience the absolute Perfection as his own real nature, retired to a quiet retreat, where he, practising the Brahmavidyā came to be pure in mind and intellect, and through the process of higher meditations, realised his Self.

virajaḥ (free from rajas or sin, free from impurities; free from vice and virtue) – The jñāna-sādhana consists in controlling the flow of the sense organs towards their sense objects, by a powerful application of the powers of discrimination and severe mental discipline. The mind is thus redeemed, in slow and steady stages, from its dross such as egoistic vanities, self-centred passions and desires, attachment, lusts, greeds and so on, and by applying such a controlled and purified mind to dwell at a limited, chosen form or idea, its powers of concentration are developed. Lastly, these newly developed powers of continued concentration are applied with greater

intensity, for delving deep beneath the delusory five matter envelopments of the Spirit to contact the Self, which is of the nature of pure Consciousness, eternal and absolute.

If one seeker, at the period of the Vaidika era, had realised the Self in him through the blessings of such a super-divine Master as Lord Death, to many of us it may seem to be a historical accident and not a sure achievement for all seekers at all times. To checkmate this possible doubt in her readers, Śruti herein emphatically asserts, 'So will he too attain who knows thus the inner Self.' Even today, he who can fulfil in himself all the necessary qualifications, explained so vividly in this Upaniṣad, and then practise the entire technique of Brahmavidyā, as diligently as Naciketā did, he too, can realise the Self and become one with Truth, a God-man upon earth.



ॐ सह नाववतु । सह नौ भुनक्तु ।
सह वीर्यं करवावहै ।
तेजस्वि नावधीतमस्तु । मा विद्विषावहै ॥
ॐ शान्तिः! शान्तिः!! शान्तिः!!!

इति कठोपनिषद् समाप्ता ॥

*om saha nāvavatu, saha nau bhunaktu,
saha vīryam karavāvahai,
tejasvi nāvadhītam-astu, mā vidviṣāvahai.
om śāntiḥ! śāntiḥ!! śāntiḥ!!!*

iti kaṭhopeniṣad samāptā.

ॐ – symbol of the Para Brahman; सह – together; नौ – (both) us; अवतु – (let Him) protect; सह – together; नौ – (both) us; भुनक्तु – come to enjoy (bliss of Knowledge); सह – together; वीर्य – effort; करवावहै – (Let us both) do; तेजस्वि नौ – well studied; अधीतमस्तु – what we study; मा – never; विद्विषावहै – quarrel with each other

Let Him protect us both. May He bless us with bliss of Knowledge. Let us exert together. May what we study be well studied. May we not hate (quarrel with) each other.

Om Peace! Peace!! Peace!!!

This peace-verse gives us an idea of the team spirit in which the Teacher and the taught approached the business of teaching and learning. How far removed is it, from the modern relationship between the teacher and taught!

Today the teacher reaches the desk only to pull through his 'job' and the students seem to be there to put in only their compulsory period of attendance! To the teacher, the taught has become an unavoidable and gruesome botheration; to the taught, the teachers are thorns in the otherwise soft flower bed of their college days!

In Brahnavidyā no progress is possible without the active cooperation of the Teacher and equally sincere co-operation of the taught. Hence, the special prayer 'May we never quarrel with each other.' This prayer seems to be specially imperative in the study of the scripture where the chances for wasteful and useless arguments are so

Chapter 2

many that they can lead us into the meshes of ruinous misunderstanding, understanding and non-understanding of the Śruti at every step.

Each day the Teacher and the pupil started and ended their lessons chanting his stanza of peace. Even today wherever the Śruti is taught, this practice is strictly followed.

‘Hari Om Tat Sat’





Alphabetical Index to Mantras

	Chapter	Valli	Mantra No.
अग्निर्यथैको भुवनं	2	5	9
अङ्गुष्ठमात्रः पुरुषो ज्योतिः	2	4	13
अङ्गुष्ठमात्रः पुरुषोऽन्तरात्मा	2	6	17
अङ्गुष्ठमात्रः पुरुषो मध्य	2	4	12
अजीर्यताममृतानाम्	1	1	28
अणोरणीयान्महतो	1	2	20
अनुपश्य यथा पूर्वे	1	1	6
अन्यच्छ्रेयोऽन्यदुतैव	1	2	1
अन्यत्र धर्मादन्यत्र	1	2	14
अरण्योर्निहितो जातवेदा	2	4	8
अविद्यायामन्तरे वर्तमानाः	1	2	5
अव्यक्तात्तु परः पुरुषो	2	6	8
अशरीरं शरीरेषु	1	2	22
अशब्दमस्पर्शमिरूपम्	1	3	15
अस्तीत्येवोपलब्धव्यः	2	6	13
अस्य विस्त्रंसमानस्य	2	5	4
आत्मानं रथिनं	1	3	3
आशाप्रतीक्षे सङ्गतं	1	1	8
आसीनो दूरं व्रजति	1	2	21
इन्द्रियाणां पृथग्भावं	2	6	6
इन्द्रियाणि हयानाहुः	1	3	4
इन्द्रियेभ्यः परं मनो	2	6	7
इन्द्रियेभ्यः परा ह्यर्था	1	3	10
इह चेदशकद् बोद्धुं	2	6	4
उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य	1	3	14
उशनह वै वाजश्रवसः	1	1	1
ऊर्ध्वमूलोऽवाक्शाख	2	6	1
ऊर्ध्वं प्राणमुन्नयत्यपानं	2	5	3

	Chapter	Vallī	Mantra No.
ऋतं पिबन्तौ सुकृतस्य	1	3	1
एको वशी सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा	2	5	12
एतच्छ्रुत्वा संपरिगृह्य	1	2	13
एतत्तुल्यं यदि मन्यसे	1	1	24
एतदालम्बनं श्रेष्ठ	1	2	17
एतद्ध्येवाक्षरं ब्रह्म	1	2	16
एष तेऽग्निर्नचिकेतः	1	1	19
एष सर्वेषु भूतेषु	1	3	12
कामस्यापि जगतः प्रतिष्ठां	1	2	11
जानाम्यहं शेषधिरित्यनित्यं	1	2	10
तदेतदिति मन्यन्ते	2	5	14
तमब्रवीत् प्रीयमाणो	1	1	16
तं दुर्दर्शं गूढमनुप्रविष्टं	1	2	12
तं ह कुमारं सन्तं	1	1	2
तां योगमिति मन्यन्ते	2	6	11
तिस्त्रो रात्रीर्यदवात्सीः	1	1	9
त्रिणाचिकेतस्त्रयमेतद्	1	1	18
त्रिणाचिकेतस्त्रिभिरेत्य	1	1	17
दूरमेते विपरीते विषूची	1	2	4
देवैरत्रापि विचिकित्सितं पुरा	1	1	21
देवैरत्रापि विचिकित्सितं किल	1	1	22
न जायते म्रियते वा	1	2	18
न तत्र सूर्यो भाति	2	5	15
न नरेणावरेण प्रोक्त	1	2	8
न प्राणेन नापानेन मर्त्यो	2	5	5
न वित्तेन तर्पणीयो मनुष्यो	1	1	27
न संदृशे तिष्ठति रूपम्	2	6	9
नाचिकेतमुपाख्यानं	1	3	16
नायमात्मा प्रवचनेन लभ्यो	1	2	23
नाविरतो दुश्चरितात्	1	2	24
न साम्परायः प्रतिभाति	1	2	6
नित्योऽनित्यानां चेतन-	2	5	13

Alphabetical Index to Mantras

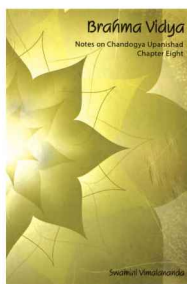
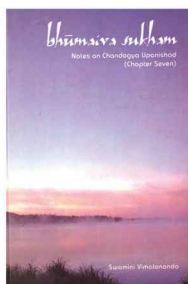
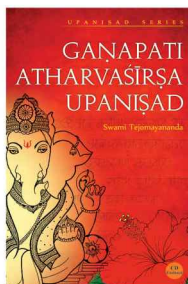
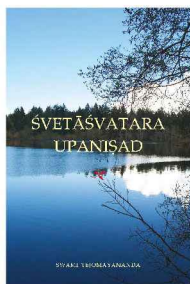
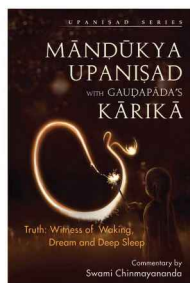
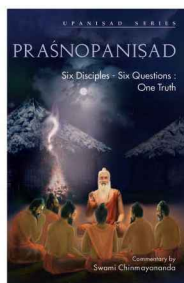
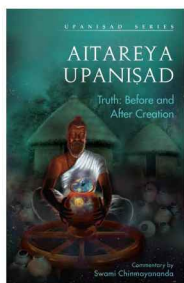
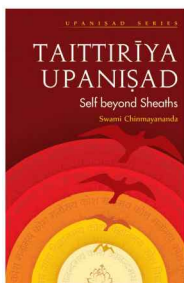
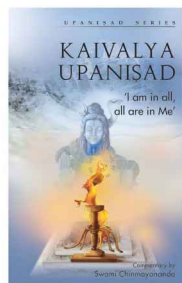
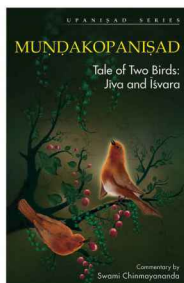
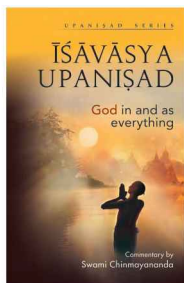
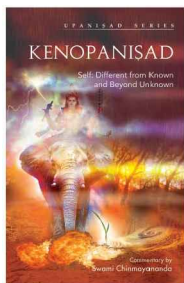
	Chapter	Vallī	Mantra No.
नैव वाचा न मनसा	2	6	12
नैषा तर्केण मतिरापनेया	1	2	9
पराचः कामाननुयन्ति	2	4	2
पराञ्चि खानि व्यतृणत्	2	4	1
पीतोदका जग्धतृणा	1	1	3
पुरमेकादशद्वारम्	2	5	1
प्र ते ब्रवीमि तदु मे	1	1	14
बहूनामेमि प्रथमो	1	1	5
भयादस्याग्निः तपति भयात्	2	6	3
मनसैवेदमाप्तव्यं	2	4	11
महतः परमव्यक्तम्	1	3	11
मृत्युप्रोक्तां नचिकेतो	2	6	18
य इमं परमं गुह्यं	1	3	17
य इमं मध्वदं वेद	2	4	5
य एष सुप्तेषु जागर्ति	2	5	8
यच्छेद् वाङ्मनसी प्राज्ञः	1	3	13
यतश्चोदेति सूर्यः	2	4	9
यथादर्शं तथात्मनि	2	6	5
यथा पुरस्ताद् भविता	1	1	11
यथोदकं दुर्गे वृष्टं	2	4	14
यथोदकं शुद्धे शुद्धम्	2	4	15
यदा पञ्चावतिष्ठन्ते	2	6	10
यदा सर्वे प्रभिद्यन्ते	2	6	15
यदा सर्वे प्रमुच्यन्ते	2	6	14
यदिदं किं च जगत् सर्वं	2	6	2
यदेवेह तदमुत्र	2	4	10
यः पूर्वं तपसो जातम्	2	4	6
यस्त्वविज्ञानवान् भवति युक्तेन (दुष्टाश्वा)	1	3	5
यस्त्वविज्ञानवान् भवति युक्तेन (सदश्वा)	1	3	6
यस्तुवविज्ञानवान् भवति अमनस्कः	1	3	7
यस्त्वविज्ञानवान् भवति समनस्कः	1	3	8
यस्मिन्निदं विचिकित्सन्ति	1	1	29

	Chapter	Vallī	Mantra No.
यस्य ब्रह्म च क्षत्रं च	1	2	25
यः सेतुरीजानानाम्	1	3	2
या प्राणेन संभवति	2	4	7
येन रूपं रसं गन्धं	2	4	3
येयं प्रेते विचिकित्सा	1	1	20
ये ये कामा दुर्लभा	1	1	25
योनिमन्ये प्रपद्यन्ते	2	5	7
लोकादिमग्निं तमुवाच	1	1	15
वायुर्यथैको भुवनं	2	5	10
विज्ञानसारथिर्यस्तु	1	3	9
वैश्वानरः प्रविशत्यतिथिः	1	1	7
शतं चैका च हृदयस्य	2	6	16
शतायुषः पुत्रपौत्रान्	1	1	23
शान्तसङ्कल्पः सुमना	1	1	10
श्रवणायापि बहुभिर्यो	1	2	7
श्रेयश्च प्रेयश्च मनुष्यम्	1	2	2
शोभावा मर्त्यस्य	1	1	26
स त्वमग्निः स्वर्ग्यमध्येषि	1	1	13
स त्वं प्रियान् प्रियरूपाःश्च	1	2	3
सर्वे वेदा यत्पदम्	1	2	15
सह नाववतु । सह नौ भुनक्तु	2	6	19
स होवाच पितरं तत	1	1	4
सूर्यो यथा सर्वलोकस्य	2	5	11
स्वप्नान्तं जागरितान्तं	2	4	4
स्वर्गे लोके न भयं	1	1	12
हंसः शुचिषद् वसुरन्तरिक्षसद्	2	5	2
हन्त त इदं प्रवक्ष्यामि	2	5	6
हन्ता चेन्मन्यते हन्तुः	1	2	19

Hari Om Tat Sat



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